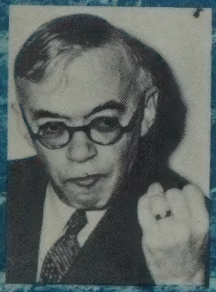
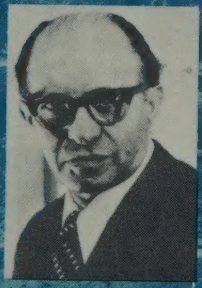
THE IRON WALL

Zionist Revisionism from Jabotinsky to Shamir





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Zionist Revisionism from Jabotinsky to Shamir

Lenni Brenner

Zed Books Ltd., 57 Caledonian Road, London N1 9BU.

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Contents

1. Jabotinsky: the Early Years 1
Odessa 1
Parents and Schooling 2
Languages 2
Early Career 3
Italy 4
Return to Odessa 5
A Psychoanalytic Interpretation 7

2. Russian Zionism: Treason to the Jews 8
Russia: The First Revolution 8
Marxism and the Bund 18
Jabotinsky's Writings 27
Conclusion 34

3. Jabotinsky in Constantinople 37
The Importance of Turkey 37
Herzl's Tactics in the Ottoman Empire 38
Zionist Policy with the New Regime 40

4. Collaborating with Tsarism and British Imperialism 43
The First World War and the Jewish Legion 43

5. The Founder of the Haganah 54
Zionism After the First World War 54
Palestine After the War 56
Jabotinsky's Trial and Sentence 60

6. Pact with the Devil – Simon Petliura 66
Resignation from the World Zionist Organization 66

7. Founding Principles of Zionist Revisionism 72
After the Resignation: Revisionism 72

8. The Years of Fascism and Terror 84
Palestine in the 1920s 84
The 1930s 86
Diaspora Revisionism 100
Jabotinsky: The Last Year 105
A Final Evaluation 108

9. Menachem Begin: The Early Years 111
Childhood 111
Betar 114

10. Begin During the Holocaust 120
Exodus from Poland 120
Arrest of Begin 123
The Polish Exile Army 125

11. The Revolt 129
The Split in the Irgun 129
The Irgun Revolt 130

12. The Revolt: Part 2 134
The Resistance Movement 134
The Displaced Persons and US Support for Zionism 135
Impact of the Irgun Revolt 137
Partition 138
Proclamation of the State of Israel 144

13. The 29 Years in the Desert 149
Herut: Early Election Performance 149
The 1950s 150
The 1960s 153
The 1970s 155

14. The Road to Sabra and Shatila 161
Sadat and the Camp David Agreement 161
The Israeli Economy under Begin 163
Intra-Jewish Antagonisms 164
Religious Bigotry Under Begin 166
Ploughshares Into Swords: Israeli Arms Export 169
US Support for Israel 170
The Chosen People Choose Again: The 1981 Election 172
The Increase in Racism 174
The Holocaust in Beirut 176

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15. Yitzhak Shamir Takes Over 192
Begin Resigns 192
Shamir's Background 193
The Maddest of the Mad 193
Stern is Killed 199
The Further Path of Terror 199
The Stern Gang's New Respectability 201
The Assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte 202
From Underground Terrorist to State Terrorist 203
The Massacre 204
Shamir Comes to Power: The Silence is Deafening 206
The Economic Crisis 207
America Comes to the Rescue 209
The Future 210

Index 216

1. Jabotinsky: the Early Years

Odessa

Odessa was and is beautiful: located on a high plateau, it looks across its bay into the Black Sea. Taken from the Turks only in 1792, Tsarist Russia's southernmost port was ice-free except for five weeks each winter, and it soon became the empire's thriving grain exporter, its character a cosmopolitan extension of the Mediterranean trade lanes.

There were no Jews in Russia until the late 18th Century. In 1471, two Jewish merchants in the retinue of a Kievan noble had 'corrupted to Judaism' two prominent clergymen of Novgorod. A heresy, known as the Judaizers, began to spread among the Russian Orthodox monks, using passages from the Old Testament as the basis of a critique of the established social order. Eventually, in 1504, their leaders were burnt at the stake and the sect disappeared; but the Holy Synod always remembered the deviants and from thence forward Jewish merchants were forbidden entry to the 'Russian earth'. It was only in the 18th Century, with the conquest of vast territories from the moribund Polish and Turkish empires, that the regime in St Petersburg was confronted with an internal Jewish population.

There were only five Jews in Odessa in 1792 when the Turks were finally driven completely out of the Ukraine. Despite intense distrust of the Jews and their religion, St Petersburg realized immediately that the scattered Jewish merchants were vital to the economy of their new acquisitions. Indeed, Jews were encouraged to migrate down from the former Polish lands into the sparsely populated Euxine hinterland. By the last quarter of the 19th Century, Odessa held the second largest Jewish community, after Warsaw, in the empire; the town was already 25% Jewish by 1880. Most shops were Jewish-owned, and the centrepiece of Odessa's prosperity, the grain trade, was in Jewish hands. Although most migrants spoke only Yiddish on arrival, Russian rapidly became their home language. Odessa Jewry was by far the most modernist Jewish community in the so-called Pale of Settlement, the area to which the Autocrats of All the Russias confined the vast bulk of their over five million Jewish subjects.

Parents and Schooling

Vladimir Yevgenievich was born on 5 October 1880, the third child and the second son of Yona and Khava Jabotinsky. Yona, or Yevgenni, to use the Russian version of his name, was a high bureaucrat in the semi-official Russian Company of Navigation and Commerce, in charge of wheat procurement along the Dniepr river; Khava was the daughter of a wealthy Chassidic merchant. The Jabotinskys were well-off and contented at the time of Vladimir's birth, but in 1884 disaster hit the family. Yevgenni became seriously ill and had to go to Berlin for treatment. The family followed and Vladimir Yevgenievich was enrolled in kindergarten and soon speaking German. He remembered little of Germany in later years beyond encountering Kaiser Wilhelm I in the Bad Ems gardens, and exchanging salutes. Eventually the Jabotinskys ran out of money and could no longer afford the expensive specialists – who immediately got rid of them, telling them to consult doctors in Russia – and they returned to the Ukraine, where Yevgenni died in 1886.

The widow soon set up a small stationery store across from their local synagogue. Her brother, a wealthy businessman, helped financially and, while reduced in circumstances, Khava gave her son violin lessons – almost obligatory for Jewish boys of his day and class – and sent him off to a private preparatory school. His first encounter with anti-Semitism was when he was eight, and it took his mother a year before she could place him in a government school – Jewish students fell under a *numerus clausus* and several schools turned him down before his family was able to place him. But anti-Semitism was not a preoccupation of the Odessa authorities; Vladimir's childhood was placid and to the end of his life he looked back at Odessa with the deepest feeling of fondness.

Languages

Khava was from Berdishev, a Ukrainian city so Jewish many of the *goyim* (gentiles) spoke Yiddish, and she had difficulty with Russian. German was her cultural language; she had only learnt Russian to speak to the servants her husband had provided for her. Later, Jabotinsky could not recall if she and Yevgenni spoke Yiddish to each other, but they spoke only Russian to their children. Although his gentile nurse knew Yiddish, common among servants, she was forbidden to speak to him in it, but Jabotinsky soon picked up the language. Later, in his teens abroad in school, he wrote to his mother in Yiddish, but he insisted he never spoke it either at home or in the street. Khava sent him to learn Hebrew from a tutor when he was six. He learned a smattering of grammar and they translated the Bible but he was not very interested and, at 13, as with millions of Jewish boys then and since, he gave it up as a dead language.

Apart from some poetry, he had no interest in Jewish culture – he found it sad, musty and uninteresting.

It was at the onset of his Hebrew lessons, he later recalled, that he had his first 'Zionist' thoughts, asking his mother 'Will we Jews, too, some day have a state of our own?' In the way of mothers everywhere, who know everything a seven-year-old needs to know, Khava replied, tenderly: 'Of course we will, you little fool!' Jabotinsky never again doubted this self-evident truth; from that day he 'did not ask any more: this was enough for me'.[1]

Russian was his language: to the end of his life, in 1940, 25 years after he last saw his native land, he thought in Russian when alone. He had learnt the alphabet from his sister Tamar when the family returned from Germany. As he grew up, literature became his passion. Though not a good student, he learned to recite much of Puskin and Lermontov by heart. He and his friends started their own newspaper; at nine he found a Spanish grammar and started teaching himself.

A first contact with English came via his sister's school lessons; French from a cousin; Latin and Greek he studied in school but they bored him – he never took to dead languages. Between his twelfth and fourteenth years he taught himself Esperanto, even writing poetry in the new international language. His interest in languages attracted the attention of some of his Polish schoolfriends and soon he was reading Adam Mickiewicz's epic *Pan Tadeusz*.

Early Career

His literary career began when he was ten years old with some poetry; by 13 he was translating the Song of Songs and other poems from the Hebrew. He did a youthful translation of Poe's *Raven* which later, in an improved version, became a standard of the anthologies. By 16 he was submitting articles to the local newspapers. In 1898 he decided to go abroad to complete his education, and he convinced the local *Odessky Listok* to take him on as a foreign correspondent. They stipulated that he could write only from European capitals where they did not already have one of their own men. He chose Berne and enrolled in the law school there.

One of the very first things Jabotinsky did in Berne was to declare himself a complete vegetarian; this lasted exactly two weeks – he was constantly hungry and socially isolated. He soon spoke politically for the first time; Nachman Syrkin, a pioneer Socialist-Zionist, had come to lecture and in the discussion period the Zionists and Marxists were soon engaged in lively debate. The 17-year-old Vladimir Yevgenievich startled the squabbling Russian student colony: he confessed himself unfamiliar with socialist ideas and was not prepared to declare himself on the question, but he knew for certain that he was a Zionist as:

> the Jewish people is a very bad people; its neighbours hate it, and rightly so. Its end in exile is a general 'St Bartholomew's Night', and its only salvation lies in a general immigration to the Land of Israel.[2]

His words infuriated the Marxists, who were determined to defeat the Tsarists and other anti-Semites. But Jabotinsky was simply repeating what he had heard in his youth.

The 'Odessa Committee', the Society for the Support of Jewish Agriculturalists and Artisans in Palestine and Syria, had been authorized by the Winter Palace in 1890, and even before the First World Zionist Congress in 1897 had over 4,000 members. It was to be years before Jabotinsky joined the movement. Palestine was still only a romantic image. He had a poem, *Gorod Mira* (City of Peace), published in 1898 in *Voskhod* (Sunrise), a St Petersburg Jewish magazine. His old Bedouin sheikh told how of old, God had promised that, after centuries of exile without honour, the Jews would return to Zion.

Italy

Jabotinsky did not stay very long in Switzerland: he never was a routine student, law had no appeal and he disliked German. By the autumn of 1898 his paper let him move on to Rome. It was an unusual place for a Russian student to go, as they were notorious for being gregarious and garrulous, always clustering together. There was no colony in Italy but, unlike so many others, Jabotinsky was not then political, and felt little compulsion to convert the company. He also enjoyed learning new languages; he had already studied Latin and he started to learn Italian six months before he left for Rome.

The city was cheap and, if one knew the language, cheaper still – one did not have to pay '*alla Inglese*'. It is no exaggeration to say that he fell in love with Italy: within six months he was Vladimiro Giabotinsky, fluent in the language on all levels. He immersed himself in Dante but did not neglect the popular dialects he encountered and, even years later, he could precisely reproduce 12 of them. No Italian, he said, ever thought he was from his own home province, but they were always astounded to discover that he was not Italian.

Giabotinsky found the University of Rome stimulating: he attended the lectures of Antonio Labriola, Italy's first Marxist academician, and was soon converted to socialism, although he never joined any organization. Nor was his freshly minted socialism incompatible with his Zionism – neither was a practical consideration for him. He believed in them only in the sense that he had his opinions on literature. He was still very much the literary gent and he felt no urge to involve himself in Italian affairs. His scant organizational contact with the local labour movement con-

sisted of writing a few articles for the socialist daily *Avanti*, defending Russian students from an attack in a rightist sheet which had called them hooligans and troublemakers.

For millenia Jews have known, as if by instinct, never to walk under the Arcus Titi, with its triumphal bas-relief of captive Judeans carrying as spoils the seven-branched sacred candelabrum or *menorah*, taken from the destroyed Temple of Jerusalem in AD 70. Vladimir looked at it, of course, but it made little impression on him – like the old ghetto quarter on the Tiber, it was from the dead past. Except for a handful of die-hards who identified Jewish emancipation with the overthrow of the temporal power of the Papacy, there was no anti-Semitism in Italy. On the contrary, Italians were proud that it had been the people of Rome, led in 1848 by the legendary republican Angelo Brunetti – Ciceruacchio – who had torn down the ancient ghetto walls. There was no discrimination, social or legal, against the 40,000 Jews of Italy. One, Luigi Luzzati, rose to be prime minister only a few years later, in 1910. The Jewish qustion was not central to Jabotinsky's existence when he left Russia and it virtually disappeared from his consciousness in Italy. He wrote later that he did not recall hearing the word '*ebreo*' once in his three-year stay in his new 'spiritual fatherland'. To the last days of his life he was a student of the Risorgimento. Italian nationalism, and particularly the great Garibaldi, became – as he understood them – the image which guided him in his later Zionist life's work.

Return to Odessa

Jabotinsky was never poor in his youth. Khava's people were substantial business folk and his journalism – mostly light *feuilletons* – permitted him to visit Khava each year until his Italianate period finally ended with a voyage via Venice and Constantinople, in the summer of 1901, to register for the draft. He returned with a favourite pen name, 'Altalena'. He had thought it meant elevator, but it meant swing. When he realized his mistake he rather liked the image – he really knew himself well enough to see that he was not yet 'stable or constant'. He was still tacking and weaving. Jabotinsky soon became totally devoted to his intense version of Zionism, but 'Altalena', 'swing', became his lifetime tribute to his care-free student days.

The government decided it could dispense with his services and he settled down in Odessa. He visited Italy later, several times, on Zionist concerns, and he watched from afar as Mussolini eventually took over, but he never understood, or really even wanted to understand, why the more or less liberal order there collapsed.

A Psychoanalytic Interpretation

The psychoanalytic interpretation of a politician, particularly from the meagre literature about his childhood, is tricky at best. But there was nothing ambiguous about Jabotinsky's oral fixation. Khava surrounded her family with prayers, and his childhood story is an endless litany of 'he learned this language, read this book, wrote that poem'. We are further told that he hated mathematics and was always undisciplined as a student: the infallible signs of oral fixation. Such types become preoccupied with those aspects of culture which their unconscious identifies with the mouth. Orally fixated individuals tend to be poor at mathematics and lack a strong sense of order. His brief vegetarianism was, again, an obvious symptom of orality. He had other stigmata of the fixation: he collected curses from many languages and loved swearing contests; he became hopelessly addicted to detective stories and westerns. Later, in his thirties, political requirements – he was to become Zionism's foremost exponent of militarism – converted him into an absurd martinet, even in civilian life clicking his heels and bowing from the waist upon introduction.[3] Such exaggerated personal mannerisms, so latterly acquired, frequently occur in intellectuals when finally, ideologically – ie verbally – they grasp the need for severe discipline.

Whether Jabotinsky could have been anything but a Zionist, given his family and class background, is a moot question, but it can be said categorically that for him to have been anything other than a writer and linguist was simply an impossibility. The word was central to his character, not only in his childhood, but throughout his entire life. Jabotinsky at 60 was still the Vladimir of six.

Jabotinsky, years later, answered a follower's detailed questionnaire on his private life, particularly his youthful memories. He did not recall his father with clarity, the older Jabotinsky was often out of the house on grain purchasing trips when Vladimir was a child at home, and his illness naturally distracted his attention from his young son. But obviously the death of a father when a boy is six years old is bound to have an effect psychologically. A boy will – unconsciously – wish for the death of the father so that he can 'take care of mummy'. In his teens Vladimir rejected the Jewish religion, never praying or following the ritual commandments of the faith with the one great exception that, to please his mother, he always recited the *kaddish*, the prayer for the dead, on the anniversary of his father's death. Perhaps his punctiliousness in this regard was a hypostatis, via reaction-formation, of his infantile Oedipal death-wish towards his father.

In general, Vladimir was markedly devoted to Khava as well, always writing, visiting her frequently, often from great distances, even celebrating her birthday in her absence. Biographer Joseph Schechtman stresses that, after the death of her older son Mitia, when Vladimir was two, she transferred her favouritism to him rather than to Tamar, his older sister.

This is not at all strange in Orthodox Jewish homes where sons are religiously paramount. As with all Zionists, Eretz Yisrael was 'the land of our forefathers', but for this paragon of devoted sons, his Zionism could only be personally fulfilled when he brought his mother to Palestine after World War I, while he still remained abroad, working for the movement. The ultra-right everywhere proclaims filial piety to be a cardinal virtue and on that score Jabotinsky was a caricature of the authoritarian profile.

Notes

1. Joseph Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman*, p. 47.
2. Joseph Nedava, 'Jabotinsky and the Bund', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. III, no. 1, (1973), p. 40.
3. Pierre Van Paassen, 'Vladimir Jabotinsky: A Reminiscence', *Midstream*, Winter 1958, p. 55.

2. Russian Zionism: Treason to the Jews

Russia: the First Revolution

The easternmost 'Christian' kingdom of 1901, Russia was, in truth, an oriental despotism, bureaucratic and murderous. Even the landed nobility was totally dominated by the bureaucrats, the *chinovniki*, loyal only to the dynasty. The populists or *narodniki*, the terrorists of the Social Revolutionary Party, were seen as the enemy, followed by Polish, Armenian and other nationalists, with the Marxists as a growing concern. In such an environment the *Odesskiya Novosti*, an ordinary provincial bourgeois paper, wasn't looking for trouble when it hired the 21-year-old Jabotinsky as a full-time columnist.

Jabotinsky: Writings and Arrest

The young Jabotinsky wasn't very profound; he wrote chatteringly about city life and the arts. His 120 roubles per month salary was princely. He felt on top of life, and this was his trouble: he was successful too fast. His attitude became completely individualistic; no one had any rights or duties. Everyone should be as free as a bird, sophomoric bourgeois anarchism, certain to fall upon contact with real life. He turned out his first play, in verse, in 1901 but not even an outline now exists. It was vaguely pacifistic and well received by the theatre circles of the city. He ran out another verse play the next year: 'There is no duty. Thou art free. Then light thy candle before Desire – Desire be thy law.'[1]

The young writer's next production was a poem, *Poor Charlotte* – an individualistic glorification of Charlotte Corday, the assassin of the great French revolutionary, Jean Paul Marat. It was deemed good enough for Maxim Gorky to distribute through his publishing house, but Jabotinsky was beginning to grate on the Odessa intelligentsia. When he tried to defend his position at the local literary–artistic circle his 'I'm all right Jack' posturing brought the crowd to its feet in a rage, and only the sudden arrival of the gendarmes saved him from a few rough blows. Such arrogance could not last under the pressure of Tsarist reality. Sure enough, the police came around in the spring of 1902, and found his articles in *Avanti*. Though unable to read Italian, they decided to hold

him while they got them translated. Seven weeks in gaol, until the authorities concluded that the pieces were of no interest to them, at last made him aware that the local revolutionaries were idealistic if misguided.

Early Political Activity

His politics at first went no further than getting the opera house to put on *La Juive*, though while doing so he came into contact with a Zionist who gave him Herzl's *Judenstaat* and the reports of the first World Zionist Congresses. It took a minor pogrom (destruction – from *pogromit*, to destroy) six weeks before Passover 1903, in a nearby town (minor only in that no one was killed) to finally bring him into organizational politics. Knowing the same could happen in Odessa, he wrote to the 12 richest Jews in the city calling for a defence set-up: none replied.

The Jewish *burzhui* were notorious for their cowardice, always afraid that if they defended themselves they would get in trouble with the authorities and, perhaps, lose their property. Besides, everybody knew it was the police themselves who always organized the pogroms, and the Jewish capitalists never had the slightest hesitation in using the police against strikers. If they mobilized their workers against the *pogromshchiki* they would be arming tomorrow's enemy against today's trouble. But one of Jabotinsky's addressees sent his letter, anonymously, to a Zionist student defence committee: they contacted him and he joined up. As it turned out there was no pogrom in Odessa that year. (The 'third section', the Okhrana – Security – the Department for the Defence of Public Security and Order, was busy preparing a pious lesson *in terrorem* for the race of deicides of the Bessarabian capital of Kishinev.)

Return of the Pogroms and the State of Russian Jewry

In today's world, 49 dead, hundreds wounded and raped, is a slow news day. But then, the 6–8 April massacre shook Jewry to the roots. It was the first killing pogrom in 20 years, a classic example of how these things were done. The government banned all but one newspaper in the province; in February, Pavoliki Krushevan, editor of the *Bessarabets*, started whipping up anti-Jewish hysteria. A peasant boy had been murdered and Krushevan told his readers that the Jews killed him to use his blood in their Passover *matzohs* (unleavened bread). At Easter, when the rabble were easiest stirred against the Christ killers, Okhrana agitators got them drunk and set them on the Jews. The world blamed the Tsar's new Interior Minister, Vyacheslav Konstantinovich von Plehve, for the massacre. A representative of the hard-liners at court, whose answer to the rising opposition was increased official terror, he ordered the local garrison, no less than 5,000 troops, to hold their fire. Eventually they stopped the slaughter and months later some of the instigators were even brought to trial in order to still the outcry from the West. Not surprisingly, they got extremely lenient sentences. But what stirred the Jewish

youth was not so much the butchery but the fact that the Jews had put up no defence in spite of months of Krushevan's rantings. They knew that the pogrom was only the first and that they would have to respond.

New ideas were abroad in Russian Jewry. Most were still followers of the traditional religion, and the rabbis had their usual explanation for their misfortunes – the will of God – but many of the better educated, particularly the youth, no longer accepted the rabbis as the final word. For some decades there had been a few *Maskilim*, enlightened bourgeois who had tried to raise the cultural level of the folk, but had no success. But two new forces had entered Jewish life simultaneously in the 1880s, and by 1903 both socialism and Zionism had become mass movements. Each, in complete antagonism to the other, demanded action on the part of the people. While both were still minorities within the Jewish population they were the coming forces.

Zionist separatism was a 'natural' ideological variant for Russian Jewry. Chaim Weizmann described their strangely isolated existence in telling of his youth in his little village. His Motol in Minsk province in the great Pripet marches of White Russia was the archetypal Jewish small town or *shtetl*. Two hundred Jewish families, one-third of the population of the town, surrounded by a sea of White Russian peasants. They were the traders, controlling the economically central timber trade of the last great primeval forest in Europe. They were the Polish landlord's agents, leasing his mills, his distillery. In *Das Kapital* Marx had written of the role of trader-nations such as the Jews, who lived 'in the pores of Polish society'. They were a significant economic factor:

> only when the development of the productive power of labour has not risen beyond a low stage, and when, therefore, the social relations within the sphere of material life, between man and man, and between man and nature are correspondingly narrow.[2]

Their primitive economic position was reflected in their cultural level. Unlike the peasantry, most Jews could read, but not Russian or Byelorussian, which had no literature in any case. Weizmann knew only a few Russian words until he was 11 years old.[3] They spoke Yiddish, and almost all men could at least decipher the Hebrew alphabet. The more prosperous, i.e. those whose fathers could afford to keep them in the *chaders* or religious schools until their teens, could make themselves understood in Hebrew. The poor youth, the *balagolahs* and *tragers*, the teamsters and porters, usually dropped out from school, their Hebrew a matter of words and phrases. Few girls, even among the economically more secure, ever learnt Hebrew, few Jewish rituals involve women, for them there was the *Tsenerene*, a Yiddish version of the Pentateuch, therefore Yiddish was the universal language of the home and hence, inevitably, of the 'Jewish street'. Thus, still only speaking, even after centuries, their unique immigrant tongue; economically sharply differen-

tiated from the peasants; dressed in outlandish costume; theologically totally distinct from their neighbours, the Jews were truly a caste apart. Years later, Jabotinsky summed them up as 'fanatics . . . "We are chosen." . . . disregarding . . . the world outside, "Pooh!" to everything new.'[4]

Piety had taken on monster proportions and thousands competed in zeal: 'Who studies Talmud 100 times is not to be compared to he who studies Talmud 101 times.' The penalty was drastic: uncontrolled orality leads to personal dishevelment, and the old Jewish slums were notoriously filthy: 'Two Jews and one cheese make three smells' was an old Polish proverb. Karl Marx was only being matter-of-fact when he remarked that 'The Jews of Poland are the smeariest of all races.'[5] The early Jewish labour movement had to instill a desire for cleanliness into their members and insist that they clean and paint their homes and give their children clean clothing.[6] Jabotinsky himself later referred to 'the grime of the ghetto'.[7] The Yiddish language was stunted and alienated from life, lacking many ordinary farming and industrial terms. Millions among the Jews, the Chassidim (pious) followed dynasties of *wunder-rabbonim*, descendants of followers of the *Baal Shem Tov* (Lord of the Good Name), Israel ben Eliaser, an 18th Century woodcutter and mystic, who sought to put joy back into the Talmudically mummified religion via dancing and other petty ecstasies. In so doing spawned *yeshivas* (Talmudic schools) stuffed with wordy students whose minds ran riot with *caballa*, secret numerical interpretations of the letters of the alphabet, hidden meanings of the scriptures, fantasies of *golems* – the original Frankenstein's monster, brought to life by incantation to protect the Jews – and *dybbuks*, possessing spirits that could only be exorcized by these rabbinical thaumaturges. The Bible, Hebrew, eternal covenants between God and his people – these were the ideological commonplaces of life. Every Passover and Day of Atonement the Jewish world ritually exclaimed *'leshono hobo Birusholaim'* ('next year in Jerusalem'). In the midst of universal Bible-bashing and Jerusalem shouting, Zionism won adherents for the same reason other Messianic movements had previously arisen in Jewish life in the wake of persecution, it worked on what most Jews automatically accepted, in accord with the universal formula later laid down by Freud: it derived from the religious baggage of the Jewish male's super-ego. It was the politics of ancient kingdoms converted into theology and transformed back, *mutatis mutandis*, into the practical politics of the age of Cecil Rhodes. Zionism was the utopian exponential of a beleaguered caste of chrematistic religious fanatics. In the real world, poverty-stricken Palestine under the Turks could have no meaning to most Jews or even to most early Zionists. In practice Zionism was, for most, nothing more than a modernized variant of the traditional pious charity: 'one Jew begging money from a second Jew to send a third Jew to Palestine'. The wretchedness of their lives drove this most humiliated of chosen peoples not to Palestine but to the actual Promised Land of work

and relative toleration in America.

The sons of the middle class reacted to their narrow religious training in three ways. Some rejected it thoroughly. The world contains many examples of truant schoolboys-turned-author, and many a former *yeshiva bocher* (Talmudic student) has described his *vants-melamed* (bedbug-teacher, buggy pedant) as the biggest fool yet to live. Many, but an ever-shrinking number, continued to fill the synagogues without questioning the faith. Others sought to combine the two extreme positions: Jewish life, they agreed, was outmoded, but it could and should be reformed. Zionism found its adherents among these last two groupings, the absolutely essential ingredient for the movement's mass following being the existence of thousands of middle-class Jewish students who could, though often with difficulty, converse in what was, for most other Jews, nothing more than a liturgical language. Although Herzl and the Western Zionist leaders pandered to the rabbis, hoping to win over the Orthodox masses, they were themselves free-thinkers, and Herzl, who saw himself as the Jewish Cecil Rhodes, was careful to give his movement a modernist tone attractive to any would-be imperialist patrons. But Russian Zionism predated his World Zionist Organization.

Hovevi Zion (Lovers of Zion) sprang up in the wake of the pogroms of the early 1880s. They sought to return to the land of their forefathers but they had no political ambitions. When the World Zionist Organization was set up in 1897, they carried into it their apolitical millenarian mentality. These *Palestinfilstvo* were not the least bit extraordinary in the theologically preoccupied Romanoff empire. Nor were the insignificant numbers, a few tens of thousands at most, who actually went off to Palestine anything new in the scenario of their Holy Land, which had seen every variety of Christian, Islamic and Jewish cult – Armenian monophysites, German Protestant Templar Pietists, Circassian Muslim warrior villages, Bahai temples, etc. Formally a part of Herzl's new movement, these lovers of Zion were still really cultists rather than serious politicals.

The Zionist Movement

Prior to the Kishinev massacre, Zionists took absolutely no part in the opposition to the regime.[8] Though not fully legal, the movement was tolerated,[9] and by 1903 there were no less than 1,572 local groups with approximately 75,000 members, though most of these were no more than nominally part of the movement, doing little more than buying a 'shekel', or membership ticket, at their local synagogue. The national organization was in the hands of ultra conservatives. In his autobiography, *Trial and Error*, published in 1949, Weizmann summarized a memo he had written Herzl back in the spring of 1903:

> Our progress, I said, was blocked there by the rightist attitude of the Zionist leadership and its clericalist inclinations . . . The Jewish youth of Russia was turning from us because it would have nothing to do with an official

> Zionism which it regarded as *Mizrachist* [religious, literally, east] and petty bourgeois, while within the movement itself all other tendencies were stamped as atheistic and revolutionary.[10]

The original memo was even blunter. The Western Zionist leaders, particularly the culturally dominant Germans, were demagogically playing for the Orthodox rabbis' support. They, wrote Weizmann, 'resort to religion as bait'. He warned: 'This will lead straight to catastrophe'. He tried to impress upon Herzl that:

> The larger part of the contemporary younger generation is anti-Zionist, not from a desire to assimilate as in Western Europe, but through revolutionary conviction . . . Almost all students belong to the revolutionary camp.

Weizmann had just been to the Pale and knew the youth:

> the attitude it evidences towards Jewish nationalism is one of antipathy, swelling at times to fanatical hatred . . . In one small town near Pinsk, for example, youngsters tore the Torah scrolls to shreds. This speaks volumes . . . In Western Europe, an exaggerated idea exists of the influence and following of the rabbis, bearing no relation to the facts.

He pleaded with Herzl: 'We must not direct our propaganda effort, as hitherto, exclusively towards the petty bourgeoisie.'[11] Weizmann had his own 'Democratic Faction', and he wanted his world leader to break with the Mizrachi. He did not know what historians discovered 65 years later, that Herzl was so deeply committed to the course of wooing Orthodox Jewry that he had secretly subsidized the Mizrachi's first world conference out of his own pocket. Herzl wanted absolutely no part of a left, even a moderate left, in his ranks – quite the contrary.

Herzl's Collaboration with Von Plehve

On 4 June, a Zionist student, Pincus Dashewski, tried to assassinate Krushevan, and Plehve decided to crack down on the movement. Herzl rushed to restore the status quo ante, journeying to St Petersburg to see Plehve on 8 and 13 August. The events are known from Herzl's *Diary*. The Russians were concerned about the effect of Kishinev on Western opinion and he prepared a memo for the minister. If the Russians would intervene with the Turks on behalf of Zionism, and subsidize Jewish emigration, the announcement could be made at 'Our Congress, which will meet at Basel from the 10th to the 23rd of August . . . This would, at the same time, put an end to certain agitation.'[12] Von Plehve explained his concern about the new directions he saw Zionism taking:

> Lately the situation has grown even worse because the Jews have been joining the revolutionary parties. We used to be sympathetic to your Zionist

> movement, as long as it worked toward emigration. You don't have to justify the movement to me. *Vous prêchez à un converti* [You are preaching to a convert]. But ever since the Minsk conference we have noticed *un changement des gros bonnets* [a change of bigwigs]. There is less talk now of Palestinian Zionism than there is about culture, organization, and Jewish nationalism. This doesn't suit us. We have noticed in particular that your leaders in Russia . . . do not really obey your Vienna Committee.[13]

Herzl jumped at his opening: 'Help me to reach land sooner and the revolt will end. And so will the defection to the socialists.'[14] Herzl and von Plehve exchanged letters. The Russians formally announced, in the vaguest terms, their support for Zionism, on proviso that the local organization confined itself to emigration and did nothing on behalf of Jewish national rights inside the empire.[15]

In return Herzl enclosed a letter he had just written to one of the Rothschilds:

> it would substantially contribute to the further improvement of the situation if the pro-Jewish papers stopped using such an odious tone toward Russia. We ought to try to work toward that end in the near future.[16]

Immediately after his meetings with Plehve, the Zionist leader gave a speech to his Russian followers asking that they avoid antagonizing the powers that be by agitating for Jewish rights. Most important, they had to avoid the red taint:

> In Palestine, in our land, such a party would vitalize our political life – and then I shall determine my own attitude toward it. You do me an injustice if you say that I am opposed to progressive social ideas. But, now, in our present condition, it is too soon to deal with such matters. They are extraneous. Zionism demands complete, not partial involvement.[17]

Herzl was simply conning his supporters: anti-socialism was integral to his diplomatic strategy. He pitched his arguments to the Kaiser in the same way he oriented toward Plehve: back us and the Jewish masses will come with us instead of following the Social Democrats. He knew none of the capitalist states wanted a socialist Palestine; neither did the Rothschilds and other rich Jews he tried to bring into the movement; and neither did he.

On 3 September, after the Congress, Herzl wrote to Plehve to tell him that, thanks to his being able to announce Russia's support for Zionism, he had been able to cut short the discussion of 'painful occurrences'. He went on to tell Plehve of the raging debate in the movement over a British offer of part of Uganda (a part which is now in Kenya) as a temporary *nachtasyl* (night shelter), as a substitute for Palestine. The bulk of the Russian Zionists were not interested. Their religious predilections made

them see things as Palestine or nothing. He then went on to tell Plehve that he had discussed Uganda versus Palestine with several revolutionaries and invented a completely bogus story that the revolutionaries preferred Palestine. His cock-and-bull story was devised to entice the Tsarists into doing more to help him get Palestine, but the true story of his encounter with the revolution was far more sinister.

During the Congress, Herzl had a secret meeting with Chaim Zhitlovsky, then a leading Social Revolutionary. In February 1915, Zhitlovsky wrote for the first time of this strange conversation; Herzl had told him that:

> I have just come from Plehve. I have his positive, binding promise that in 15 years, at the maximum, he will effectuate for us a charter for Palestine. But this is tied to one condition: the Jewish revolutionaries shall cease their struggle against the Russian government. If in 15 years from the time of the agreement Plehve does not effectuate the charter, they become free again to do what they consider necessary.

Zhitlovsky wrote that the bizarre proposal made such an impression on him that he was able to remember the entire conversation word for word. He responded to Herzl's offer in the most contemptuous manner:

> We Jewish revolutionaries, even the most national among us, are not Zionists and do not believe that Zionism is able to resolve our problem. To transfer the Jewish people from Russia to Eretz-Yisroel is, in our eyes, a utopia, and because of a utopia we will not renounce the paths upon which we have embarked – the path of the revolutionary struggle against the Russian government, which should also lead to the freedom of the Jewish people.

He warned his interlocutor that:

> The situation of Zionism is already dubious enough by the very fact of its standing aloof from the revolution. Its situation in Jewish life would become impossible if it could be shown that it undertakes positive steps to damage the Jewish revolutionary struggle.

Zhitlovsky told Herzl that the Social Revolutionary fighting organization was already planning to kill Plehve, and Herzl finally grasped that his plan to get the Russian revolution called off was a fantasy. He made Zhitlovsky promise not to reveal the conversation to anyone but, as we shall see anon, word did get out almost immediately. Zhitlovsky, in 1915, said of Herzl:

> [He] was, in general, too 'loyal' to the ruling authorities – as is proper for a diplomat who has to deal with the powers that be – for him ever to be

> interested in revolutionists and involve them in his calculations . . . He made the journey, of course, not in order to intercede for the people of Israel and to awaken compassion for us in Plehve's heart. He travelled as a politician who does not concern himself with sentiments, but *interests* . . . Herzl's 'politics' is built on pure diplomacy, which seriously believes that the political history of humanity is made by a few people, a few leaders, and that what they arrange among themselves becomes the content of political history.[18]

Jewish Response to Herzl's Endeavours

Herzl's meeting with the Tsarists was not well received by the Jewish people. The left wing enemies of Zionism simply saw him as a traitor, but even in the WZO opinion was against the venture from the outset and at the Basel Congress it was agreed not to discuss the whole affair. Only one delegate rose in defence of their leader's meeting with the butcher of Kishinev: Jabotinsky. He argued that it was vital to separate tactics and ethics and also defended Herzl's line that there was no room in the movement for a socialist faction. Pandemonium broke loose and Herzl had to rush onto the stage to get him away from the podium.[19]

Was Herzl correct in going to von Plehve and was Jabotinsky right to defend him? Weizmann dealt with the episode quite well in *Trial and Error*:

> I . . . believed that the step was not only humiliating, but utterly pointless . . . Unreality could go no further . . . Nothing came, naturally, of Herzl's 'cordial' conversations with von Plehve, nothing, that is, except disillusionment and deeper despair, and a deeper division between the Zionists and the revolutionaries.[20]

Herzl's plan was for rich Jews to, in effect, buy Palestine from the Turks in exchange for covering the Sublime Porte's foreign debt. A confirmed monarchist, he regretted that the Christian world would never tolerate a kingdom of the Jews for theological reasons. He would settle for nothing less than an aristocratic republic modelled on the Doges of Venice – in his *Diaries* he refers to his dream of marrying the daughters of the best families of his future state into the dynasties of Europe. He insisted that the delegates to the first World Zionist Congress wear formal attire so that the event would be taken 'seriously'. To him, *Hockpolitik* was all that existed. And he was convinced as early as June 1895 that 'The anti-Semites will become our most dependable friends, the anti-Semitic countries our allies.'[21] Today even his modern pro-Zionist biographers see him as an incurable snob and crank. Jabotinsky supported him at the Congress because he shared the same elegant Machiavellianism, declaring himself unable to appreciate

> Aesthetically fastidious criticism of visits and handshakes, these all-comprehensive investigations of the question whether or not it is per-

> missible and necessary to send greeting telegrams to the Sultan or to come to Petersburg.[22]

He was right on a formal level; most Zionists approved of Herzl's attempts to win the patronage of Abdul Hamid II despite the fact that Hamid was responsible for the slaughter of tens of thousands of Armenians – far more than Nicholas II ever killed Jews. But ordinary Zionists, as would most people, found it far easier to befriend someone else's murderer than to run with their own destroyer. Jabotinsky had his own interpretation of his hero Giuseppe Mazzini's *'Noi faramo l'Italia anche uniti col Diavolo'* (For Italy we would even unite with the Devil), which he reworked into 'In working for Palestine I would even ally myself with the Devil.' Mazzini's *mot* has become the revealed religion of modern nationalists but Jabotinsky's reading passeth all others. They usually add an unspoken qualification: against our main enemy. Herzl and Jabotinsky wanted more than a country of their own – they wanted a colony. In the world of imperialism – *Hockpolitik* – Romanoff was the enemy of the Jews; he was a potential ally of Zionism. Herzl and Jabotinsky had no doubt who their real enemies were: the socialists.

Jabotinsky and Jewish Self-Defence

Little is known specifically about Jabotinsky's activities in the Zionist defence during the 1903–7 period, but there was little to their efforts beyond some student heroism. Their class base, the Jewish petty bourgeoisie, then had a reputation for their weak physiques and moral cowardice. Without being able to tell where the next pogrom would occur, it was impossible to allocate what weapons they obtained. Opposition to Social Democracy meant the Zionist defence had no base in the larger concentrations of Jewish workers and no potential of allies among gentile socialists. Zionist defence was more a determination on the part of the youth than a reality. By 1906 Jabotinsky concluded:

> Self-defense – one can hardly speak about it in earnest. In the final analysis, it did not do us any good; in the beginning, the fear of it actually prevented a few pogroms, but now, when *they* have seen it in action and have compared the number of Jews and pogromists killed – who takes it seriously? When they wish, they start a pogrom and kill as many Jews as they want, and self-defense is just of no use. Of course, there is (moral) consolation in self-defense. But its practical balance amounts to zero and will remain zero, and it is time quietly to recognize it aloud, so that people should not hope in vain.[23]

It is difficult to find anything praiseworthy in Jabotinsky's activities during the years 1903–8, the period of the first Russian revolution – translating Chaim Nachman Bialik's *In the City of Slaughter* in the midst of slaughter hardly qualifies for a statue in the park. Some of Jabotinsky's

doings must inevitably be puzzling to any serious student of the Russian revolution. That the Tsar was evil and the desire of the people to overthrow him wholly justified is generally agreed; therefore certain events evoke universal responses: that Eisenstein's *Potemkin* is a masterpiece has been recognized from the moment it came out. Later historians, after examining the weaknesses of the revolutionary leaders of the mutiny, have not even sought to challenge the universal conclusion that what they did was wholly meritorious. Jabotinsky, however, opposed the mutiny. Elias Gilner, an early and devoted follower, writes that when, on 14 June 1905, the crew of the battleship, riding in the Odessa roadstead, rose in protest against maggots in their meat:

> revolutionary circles held agitational meetings. Jabotinsky attended one such meeting in the office of a newspaper. Suddenly he was moved to an angry outburst; he scorned the mutiny as premature and predicted a pogrom in its wake. His words were ignored. A few days later a small pogrom did indeed break out, but the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia resented what it considered Jabotinsky's arrogance and broke off with him.[24]

Jabotinsky's offence against the revolution compels us to turn from him to examine his antagonists on the Jewish and Russian left, for it is their struggle against the Tsar that determined the immediate and long-term destiny of Jewry, of Russia and, indeed, all of modern civilization.

Marxism and the Bund

Marxism had originally been an affair of Russian language speakers, but the Jewish youth were the first of the oppressed nationalities to adopt it. The workers of the great Jewish slums of Warsaw and other cities of the old kingdom of Poland–Lithuania were the most literate of their class in the empire. Their poverty, their national oppression and the general oppression of Tsarism, made them into natural tinder for the fiery Russian revolutionary movement. The radicalized Jewish intelligentsia, if fluent in either Polish or Russian, usually opted for the wider worlds either language opened up. But all serious socialists realized that propaganda must be in the language of the people, and out of this need arose the *Algemeiner Yiddisher Arbeiterbund in Poiln, Lite un Rusland* – the General Jewish Workers' League of Poland, Lithuania and Russia – the Bund. Almost from inception they developed a severe nationalist tinge, proclaiming themselves to be the sole socialist organization for Jews everywhere in the empire. Their comrades in the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party welcomed the Jewish workers, but refused to accommodate to the Bund's separatist ideas. Marxism is a guide to revolutionary struggle, and the need for unity compels Marxists to reject anything that unnecessarily divides the workers. When individual Jews spoke the lan-

guage of the people around them they had no need to join special Jewish groupings. And even a Yiddish propagandist section had to be strictly subordinated to the general struggle. Tsarist Russia had at least 192 nationalities within it and the Okhrana used the traditional antagonisms between these nationalities to divide the workers, pitting Christians against Jews, and Muslim Tatars against the Armenians in the Baku oil-fields. Experience taught Social Democracy to see nationalism as a diversion, an extension of the hyper-literacy of the petty-bourgeoisie, which everywhere drags along the obsolete values and narrowness of the dominant forces in their national societies. Bolsheviks and Mensheviks fully agreed in their diagnosis of Bundism. Georgi Plekhanov, Vladimir Lenin and the other Russians were fully supported by the most outstanding of the socialist Jews, most notably Julius Martov, a former founder of the Bund, and Lev Davidovich Trotsky, both leaders of the younger Mensheviks. They had not the slightest tolerance of Zionism which they saw as obviously petty bourgeois in its appeal. They rarely directly encountered it. Only Trotsky attended a World Zionist Congress, once, in Basle in 1903, when he happened to be in the city. Zionism had little appeal to Jewish workers beyond the narrowest of 'Jewish' trades, i.e. kosher butchers and the like. But the Bund was a bone in their throats, along with all the other socialist groupings which attempted to combine Marxism and nationalism. It compelled them, most notably Lenin, to scientifically define Marxism, nation, and nationalism.

Lenin is universally recognized as an extraordinary writer; prolific – his collected works run to more than 40 volumes – but rarely even minutely factually wrong. He was possessed with the truth, particularly the realities of social struggle and even bourgeois Jewish scholars often have the highest regard for his name. The Soviet Union has since undergone an immense and often sinister evolution on the Jewish question, as on every other. But none, save the inevitable cranks, even pretend he had the slightest trace of anti-Semitism or hostility towards non-Russians. Indeed, it is said he refused to tolerate even the most harmless ethnic or dialect humour. In power he mercilessly suppressed anti-Semitism, and after the Civil War the capitalist Jewish charities in America co-operated with the Soviets in the rehabilitation of the ravaged Jewish communities in the Ukraine.

Since our epoch is that of the decline of the venerable empires, perhaps it was inevitable that the struggles of the oppressed nationalities should have given their nationalism a patina of undeserved glory, an illusion invariably shattered by the grim realities of the national states that arose out of the ruins of empire. Lenin never entertained such self-deceptions – for him there could be only one opinion regarding the relationship of Marxism and nationalism:

> Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the 'most just', 'purest', most refined and civilized brand. In place of all forms of

> nationalism Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity, a unity that is growing before our eyes with every mile of railway line that is built, with every international trust, and every workers' association . . . Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course! Fight *for* any kind of national development, *for* 'national culture' in general? – Of course not. The economic development of capitalist society presents us with examples of immature nationalist movements all over the world, examples of the formation of big nations out of a number of small ones, or to the detriment of some of the small ones, and also examples of the assimilation of nations. The development of nationality in general is the principle of bourgeois nationalism; hence the exclusiveness of bourgeois nationalism, hence the endless national bickering. The proletariat, however, far from undertaking to uphold the national development of every nation, on the contrary, warns the masses against such illusions . . . The proletariat cannot support any consecration of nationalism.[25]

With world Jewry it was an open and shut case. They did not have a common territory, language or economy, the minimal requirements of nationality. Lenin was contemptuous of Jewish nationalism:

> The Jews in Galicia and in Russia are not a nation; unfortunately (through *no* fault of their own but through that of the Purishkeviches), they are still a *caste* here . . . It is . . . only Jewish reactionary philistines, who want to turn back the wheel of history, and make it proceed, not from the conditions prevailing in Russia and Galicia to those prevailing in Paris and New York, but in the reverse direction – only they can clamor against 'assimilation'.[26]

The measure of contempt the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party had for Zionism was best summed up in the Menshevik Plekhanov's description of the Bundists as 'Zionists with seasickness'. But while he vividly portrayed the national sectarianism of the Bund there was still a huge difference between the two movements. The Bund had no interest whatsoever in Hebrew or Palestine, which they sneered at as *'dos gepeigerte land'* (the land that had died). Their central concept was *'dawkeit'* (hereness). Jews were fully entitled to rights 'here', they should not have to emigrate to America or Palestine to get them.

The Bund not only shared the general Marxist conception of Zionism – a reactionary utopia – but they were the first to experience it as a counter-revolutionary force. Though themselves sectarian nationalists concerning the Yiddish language, they recognized the general need for unity with Polish and Russian workers in both the trade union struggle and the political struggle against the Tsar. They soon encountered a new breed of Zionists who tried to syncretize socialism and Zionism. The *Po'ale Zion* (Workers of Zion) talked about socialism in Palestine but referred to uniting with non-Jews in the struggle for socialism in Russia as assimilation, 'fighting other people's battles'. Gentile workers would

always be anti-Semitic; they denounced the Bund's programme as an illusion, claiming most Jewish workers were not factory proletarians but shop artisans, incapable of waging a real class struggle in the Diaspora. Only in their own state could Jews create a real proletariat from the bottom up. In 1901, the Bund drove the Po'ale Zionists out of their unions, informing them that, since they lived in Pinsk and not Palestine, such talk in Pinsk was objectively class-treason, as the Jewish workers of Pinsk were, quite definitely, engaged in a desperate class struggle with the capitalists and the police.

The 1905 Uprising

It was in this same period that an Okhrana official, Sergei Zubatov, concluded that it was impossible to completely crush opposition to the regime. He decided to build up a network of demagogues, renegades and spies to divide and disrupt the growing, but still naive, mass movement against the throne. His most famous agent, Father Georgi Gapon, tried to aim the St Petersburg Workmens' Association exclusively at the capitalists rather than at the autocrat, but pressure from below compelled him to lead hundreds of thousands of his followers to the Winter Palace to tell the 'little father' of the sufferings of his people at the hands of the bureaucrats. And thus, on what became known as Bloody Sunday, 9 January 1905, almost a thousand workers, many carrying icons, were machine-gunned by the Cossacks, emancipating the survivors of their traditional illusions, and turning them into the certain destroyers of the dynasty. What will be known forever as '1905' became the greatest popular uprising since the Paris Commune. Gapon fled abroad and wrote of his experiences – the general outline of Gapon's career can be found in any standard history of Russia or Communism, but his naive document, *The Story of My Life*, sank into oblivion. In it he told of his mentor's stratagems from the inside and he listed some of the other *Zubatovshchiki*:

> There was also Dr Shapiro, one of the leaders of the Zionist movement. Zubatoff apparently gave help to all of these persons, and I summarized his policy in the ancient formula, *Divide et impera*. He was evidently attempting to organize the Jewish workmen under the flag of Zionism, and trying to detach them from the Revolutionary Party, while he was enlisting the Christian workmen under the pretence of a struggle for economic concessions, in order to separate them also from political action.[27]

'Dr Shapiro' was really the General Zionist Heinrich Shayevich. As early as 1900 Zubatov had seen that the Zionists were deeply antagonistic to the revolution and had counselled that the regime not suppress them.[28] In July 1901, a Narodnik renegade, Manya Wilbushevich, set up a Zubatovist Jewish Independent Workers' Party in Minsk with the help of Joseph Goldberg, a Labour Zionist, who wrote the new party's platform: an attack on the Bund for bringing up political matters alien to the

workers' economic struggles.[29] In November, the Po'ale Zionists held a conference in Minsk; Wilbushevich wrote a triumphant letter to Zubatov:

> Congratulate me with a great victory I did not expect so soon. The Congress of Zionists has decided to fight the Bund. Now all the Zionists are our assistants. It only remains to discover how to make use of their services.[30]

Wilbushevich, through Zubatov, got Plehve to allow an all-Russian Zionist convention in Minsk in August 1902.[31] Shayevich, a convinced monarchist, joined the Independents at the convention and soon became their Odessa leader.[32] They had their best success in Minsk where the local police looked the other way when they put on some strictly non-political strikes, but they were frozen out of Vilna by a wall of worker hostility. When Shayevich's movement in Odessa began to get beyond his control, the workers began a wave of strikes. This was too much for Plehve and in July 1903 he ordered them to close down. Wilbushevich actually tried to play on as penitent revolutionary, but hatred for her as an Okhrana felon-setter was overwhelming, and early in the winter of 1904 she decamped to Palestine where she became one of the leading figures in the Labour Zionist movement.[33]

If the Zubatov–Zionist connection was not enough, the Bund's diagnosis of Zionism as another rat-catcher of Hamelin was confirmed after the Basle Congress when Zhitlovsky's account of Herzl's incredible proposal got to Vladimir Medem, perhaps the bitterest opponent of Zionism within the Bund. Medem had seen Herzl at the Congress and was struck by the contrast between Herzl's famous regal appearance – he is said to have reminded those familiar with art of a bas-relief of the Assyrian Tiglath Pileser III – and his lack of understanding of politics:

> What he wished to speak to the Bund about was easy to comprehend: during his conversation with Plehve he had received an intimation that Zionism could count on the support of the Russian government in return for which it must seek to restrain the revolutionary movement of the Jewish workers. Herzl had presumably desired to carry out that particular mission – an indication of his profound understanding of the Bund![34]

The First Duma

Jewish revolutionary loathing for Zionism only increased during the subsequent revolution. In October 1905 the regime granted a Duma, a parliament, as part of the regime's manoeuvres to isolate and crush the nation-wide working-class general strike rocking the throne. All revolutionaries, excepting the Georgian Mensheviks, boycotted the elections as they still had hopes of bringing down the dynasty. In the event they erred, there were still illiterate peasant troops untouched by the revolt and the generals were able to use them to provide escorts for the *pogromshchiki* and to smash the lightly-armed worker guards. But the Tsar was still weak

and had to allow the elections to continue, and in April those who did not heed the boycott elected a Duma dominated by the Cadets, the Constitutional Democrats, the party of the liberal bourgeoisie. Among the new representatives were 12 Jews, five of them Zionists.

Although the Jews suffered the worst oppression of the Tsar's European subjects and conversely had the most to gain from a complete revolutionary victory, the Jewish capitalists and petty bourgeoisie – Orthodox, liberal assimilationist and Zionist – were the most timid national grouping of their class throughout the entire struggle against the Tsar.[35] They had no interest whatsoever in changing society except for the restrictions against themselves as Jews.

Many modern Jewish writers have sentimentalized the ghetto, but serious scholars would concur with Jabotinsky's assessment of the realities of 'its submissiveness before a government, its lack of self-assurance, its worship of a *gevir* [rich man], its readiness to provide Levites for any heathen shrine.'[36] By 1906, the organized workers had emancipated themselves from the general servility but, for the most part, the larger community could be described as Mendele Mocher Sforim, the first of the literary masters produced by the ghetto, comically portrayed his people in 1891 in his *Unease in Zion*:

> This is the way of Jews, the nature imbued in them from time immemorial, that whenever they see a fellow with a gold coin, let him be what he will, even a calf, a beast in human form – he becomes their God, and they bow down to him, dance and frolic before him, giving glory to his name.[37]

Elected by a politically naive constituency, the five Zionists completely shared their backwardness. For them, Zionism was psychologically an answer to the slurs of their Christian class rivals. They, too, could now discourse about the ancient glories of their people; although they were language enthusiasts, they were stay-at-home Zionists, not at all the type to settle in Palestine. They feared socialism, knowing that a thoroughgoing revolution would mean the rise of peasant marketing co-operatives which would put many Jewish traders out of business. They also shared the *shtetl's* skepticism that 'Ivan', the ordinary *shagits* (young male gentile), would ever be the firm ally of the Jews. Far more 'realistic', they preferred to rely on their opposite Russian numbers, the solid lawyers and professors of the Constitutional Democrats, and most Zionist leaders affiliated with the upper crust liberal *Kadety*.[38] The *maus-politik* of the Zionist delegates had already been fully expressed at the 1902 Minsk Zionist convention, by one of them, S. Y. Rosenbaum: 'We are more than loyal.'[39] Jews loyal to the Tsar!

Disaster occurred almost immediately. Romanoff knew that after he had arrested the Soviet, the council that had sprung up to co-ordinate the workers' general strike, he had nothing to fear from the unrepresentative parliament in the Tavricheski Palace and, on 8 July, after they had sat for

only 72 days, he peremptorily set the troops on them. The frock-coated Cadets duly registered outrage, called on the people not to pay taxes and not to serve in the army. The workers, who had not voted for them, were hardly about to follow their lead now, and without the masses behind it, the Duma was no more than an axe without a handle. The Tsar realized he needed a Duma in order to appease foreign critics, and held new elections in February 1907.

By then, the rest of the Mensheviks, realizing that the revolution had been temporarily defeated in the streets, put up candidates. They won 65 seats, sharply cutting into the Cadet vote. Only six Jews were returned, only one of them a Zionist. The Tsar was even less pleased with this Duma and he dissolved it in June 1907. No Zionists were elected to the Third Duma; Russian Zionism's insignificant parliamentary role was over.

The Role of the Zionists

Lending support to the Cadets was not the only role played by Zionists during the 1905 drama: behind the scenes, Nahum Sokolow, then a Warsaw editor, later president of the World Zionist Organization, was holding meetings with Count Sergei Witte, the Tsar's prime minister. Not much is known about these conferences – they are not mentioned in either the *Encyclopaedia of Zionism and Israel* or the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* articles on Sokolow and are barely touched upon by Florian Sokolow in his hagiography of his father. What is known is that they started in October 1905 on the eve of Witte's appointment to office, and that Sokolow asked him to grant the Jews their rights and stop the pogroms; and that Witte always excused himself as lacking the power to help them. Zionist circumspection about these delicate *pourparlers* leads us to emphasize that the vast bulk of the educated Jewish youth were out in the streets trying to overthrow the Tsar while Sokolow was going cap in hand to his prime minister.[40] Nor were these to be the last direct Zionist contacts with the pogromist regime. In July 1908, David Wolffsohn, Herzl's successor as president of the WZO, came to Petersburg to meet Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin and Foreign Minister Alexandr Izwolsky over the regime's harassment of the Zionist's Jewish Colonial Trust Bank. Wolffsohn was splendidly received:[41] Izwolsky was eager to please a Jew who asked so little of him and Wolffsohn and the anti-Semite got along famously: 'I might also say that I made a Zionist of him', Wolffsohn wrote.[42]

Jabotinsky was prominent in the development of Russian Zionism's *Gegenwartsarbeit in Landspolitik* (day to day practical policies in the countries of the Diaspora) in those bloody years. He was a prominent figure at the Russian Zionist conference, held in Helsingfors (Helsinki), 21–27 November 1906. It was here that abstentionism was buried, and a programme calling for a democratic regime, with national cultural autonomy for the Jews, was endorsed. But in politics there is always one key

question: how do you bell the cat? The Jews were a scattered 4.3% of the population: alone, they could never get their rights, but Jabotinsky's choices for potential allies were invariably unrealistic. He ran for the Second Duma, in the Ukrainian province of Volhynia; even here Jews constituted only 13.24% of the population and he proposed that they turn first to the peasants. However, if they proved anti-Semitic he favoured a deal with the landlords. Both turned out for the reactionaries.

What Jabotinsky did not grasp was that eventually, as happened in 1917, some of the peasants would break away from Black Hundredsism, but that the landlords never would. He also worked closely with the Ukrainian nationalists. In the many-sided civil war between 1917 and 1921, the Ukrainian armies became the worst of the pogromists. Defeated in Volhynia, he ran again, for the Third Duma, from Odessa, in the autumn 1907 elections. A Social Democrat came in first on the first round, with Jabotinsky finishing third in a field of four. Since the Socialist did not win 50% of the votes a second vote was needed. The authorities ruled the Social Democrat off the ballot on a pretext, leaving Jabotinsky and a Cadet to face the Tsar's man. Jabotinsky was compelled to withdraw as Jewish opinion would not tolerate the Zionists splitting the progressive vote. All of his stratagems were useless. There was only one grouping in Russia that could defeat Tsarism and get the Jews their rights, and that was the force that ultimately did destroy Tsarism, the workers, but to the very end of his Russian career Jabotinsky fought tooth and nail against the socialist movement.

Schechtman, Jabotinsky's personal disciple even in these early days of his career, stresses that the main focus of Jabotinsky's propagandistic work during the revolution was the battle against assimilation and socialism.[43] Jabotinsky libelled the Jewish leftists: in November 1905, Medem had given a speech on the revolutionary developments. He had remarked that:

> Blood is being shed, the situation is horrible, but one should bear in mind (I can literally recall the words that follow): 'Blood constitutes that lubricant without which the carriage of history does not move ahead.' Here was a thought, one would imagine, that was perfectly legitimate and plainly elementary . . . some sort of Zionist (I don't know whether he was a fool or a vicious faker) who wrote . . . I allegedly stated that *Jewish* blood is the lubricant of the *Russian* revolution . . . I published a denial . . . to no avail . . . years later, the identical statement continues to meander thru Zionist byways.[44]

For the record, it was Aaron Hermoni, a young student, who had put the famous libel into circulation, but Jabotinsky picked up on it and for the rest of his life he never tired of retailing the notorious canard. As late as 1940 he was still insisting that 'in Russia, it was a Jewish revolutionary who uttered the often-quoted formula: "Jewish blood is the best for oiling

the wheels of progress".'[45] The Bund, not the Bolsheviks or the Mensheviks, whom he rarely encountered in the Pale, were his main leftist target in these pre-World War I years. In 1906 he wrote a pamphlet, *The Bund and Zionism*, in which he denied the fundamental assumptions of all revolutionary currents, including the Bund, that anti-Semitism could be defeated by the revolution:

> All their feats of bravery are in vain and their sacrifices useless, for in the new Russia, both they and we will be driven over the fence, forcibly and scornfully, as in Russia before its regeneration.[46]

In the winter of 1905, Jabotinsky attacked the non-Jewish left at a public meeting in Petersburg, claiming that they were not doing enough to protect the Jews:

> People have tried to comfort us by telling us that there were no workers among those who murdered us. Perhaps. Perhaps it was not the proletariat who made pogroms on us. But the proletariat did to us something worse than that: they *forgot* us. *That* is a real pogrom.[47]

Since, at the worst, forgetting the Jews is not 'a real pogrom', it is difficult to take his remarks seriously, but the workers did try to stop the *pogromshchiki*. Trotsky, who had headed the Petersburg Soviet, later wrote of their defence, set up after 'hooligans' started beating up Jews and revolutionaries, even on the Nevsky Prospekt, with brass knuckle dusters. The so-called Black Hundreds planned to attack a revolutionary funeral procession for the latest victims of the Tsarists. The workers bought out the gun stores, made thousands of daggers, brass knuckle dusters and wire whips and night patrols were started in the factory districts. The pogrom never came off – the workers were too well-armed and organized. This time the police, Cossacks, and elite Guard units were able to drive the defence off the streets, but there were no further attempts to whip up another pogrom.[48]

It was estimated that there were only 3,322,000 industrial, commercial and mine workers in 1897, and only slightly more in 1905. Only 200,000 were affiliated to Soviets; these were only freshly radicalized. The mass of the moujiks were barely touched by the revolt, and the Tsar was able to use the peasant soldiery as a battering ram against the workers. But no one could have called off the vast wave of divergent forms of struggle known as '1905' but which was, at different times and places, a general strike, a workers' revolt in Moscow, a nationalist revolt in the Baltic and Caucasus and elsewhere, and a colossal wave of student terrorism taking the lives of thousands of bureaucrats. The regime had only one reply – violence. Pogrom hordes against the Jews, Tatar mobs against Armenians, the police and army against the workers. The worst of the anti-Jewish atrocities occurred in October 1905, at the beginning of the regime's

counter-attack against the general strike. Lenin estimated that 4,000 Jews were murdered in 100 towns, mostly in the countryside of the Pale, where the organized workers were weakest. But even in the Pale the non-Jewish workers, as in Vilna, were resolutely on the side of the Jews[49] – Jews and revolutionaries were the joint victims of the Tsar's knout. Trotsky's estimate for the period between Bloody Sunday, 9 January 1905, and the opening of the First Duma was 14,000 killed, 1,000 executions, over 20,000 wounded and another 70,000 jailed and exiled. In Latvia, 749 workers and peasants were executed in the autumn of 1905 by the Teutonic Baltic barons. Many were forced to run the gauntlet, others were flogged to death, hung or shot. The revolution owes no apology to the Jews, and still less to the Zionists. Proof of loyalty to the Jews was shown then and again later, in 1917–21, when the Red Army fought the imperialist-subsidized pogromists in the field.

Jabotinsky's Writings

In 1908, Jabotinsky read a new verse play, *Chuzhbina*, The Alien Land, to a circle of writers. Some of it saw print in 1910 and the complete text appeared in Berlin in 1922. It has never been translated. Schechtman tells us of this interesting work (republished 12 years later, after the Bolshevik revolution, by an *émigré* publishing house) which must stand as Jabotinsky's retrospective and prognostic interpretation of the Russian revolution and Marxism alike. In it, Odessa's Social Democrats, mostly Jews, look like winners and polite society courts them. Except Gonta. He tells them that while they think they are in command of events they are nothing more than 'splinters on the waves of another nation's vortexes . . . holding a harmless sword in a nerveless hand, you are useless in the struggle!' Gonta has no answers, only the 'cold, inexorable, unconquerable, hard-hearted, bottomless pride of a King who has been deprived of his throne and crown.' Eventually, the Jewish radicals realize their message is not getting across to the Russian masses; soon, a pogrom occurs, and the youths rush to the synagogue to organize a defence but, of course, it is too late, time had been wasted on useless revolutionary theorizing. Gonta reminds them again: 'We are mere shadow, there is no role for us to play, events run their course independent of our will.' Gonta–Jabotinsky calls upon them to 'cut off the last bridge between ourselves and the alien land, and to pronounce anathema! Not to accept and not to bestow anything!' Through a 'real' Russian worker, Styopa, he tells the misguided Jewish socialists that what the Russian masses really want is a 'Russian voice . . . with the flavour of the steppes and of the Volga.'[50]

Modern scholars automatically compare Jabotinsky's prognostications with what they, in degree, know of the larger events that took place in Russia in 1903–8 and since. Stalin's betrayal of Leninism, and his final death-bed paranoia about being poisoned by Zionist doctors, come into

mind. Was Jabotinsky therefore right after all? Was the revolution an illusion from the outset, particularly from a Jewish point of view? In reality there is not the slightest relationship between Jabotinsky's gloomy conceptions and what was to happen. Josef Vissarionovich Dzugashvili – Stalin – was a Georgian, not a Russian or even an Aryan. He had nothing of the Volga or the steppes in him. Trotsky was born on a farm in the Ukrainian steppes at Yanovka, near Bobrinetz, in Kherson province. More important, the Russian workers did not fail the Jews: the revolution came to power and gave the Jews complete equality. Even after Lenin died, in 1924, and after Trotsky was exiled in 1927, Stalin was not identified in the world's mind with anti-Semitism. Yiddish flowered. He had a Yiddish Palestine, Birobijan, on the Amur river along the Manchurian border.

The collapse of revolutionary values had nothing to do with Jewish-Russian relations. It was inevitable in an isolated backward Russia devastated by three years of war followed by four years of civil war and foreign invasion. Ideals of equality cannot thrive amidst tens of millions of illiterate peasants, severe and universal poverty. Many of the best idealists had given their lives in the civil war. Many survivors broke spiritually surveying the ruins of the destroyed empire they had inherited. They wanted to get something back for their ordeal. They feared that furthering revolution abroad would only complicate the country's economic problems. Stalin attracted many, including Jews, by allowing party members to receive the same salaries that Lenin was compelled to give to the remnants of the bourgeois scientists who had not fled abroad. Under Lenin's policy of *uravnilovka* or wage-levelling, party members, even those doing the same work as the non-political scientists, could not make a rouble more than the wage of a skilled factory-hand – the classic formula for the pay of officials of a workers' state, inherited from the Paris Commune of 1870. Trotsky had pointed to back-handed references by Stalin to his being Jewish: 'we fight against Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev, not because they are Jews, but because . . .' but even Trotsky made no claim that Stalin discriminated against Jews in social life. During the great purges of the late thirties, Stalin's papers always ran the birth names of victims next to their party names, many were Jewish, and again Trotsky saw this as Stalin pandering to the remnants of anti-Semitism in an attempt to find himself a new social base for his regime. But the general political world, including the latter-day Jabotinsky, most definitely did not see the Soviet Union as anti-Semitic.

As late as 1940, even during the Hitler–Stalin pact period, Jabotinsky could write that:

> For the last ten years we have heard no report of any symptoms of anti-Semitism in any Soviet territory, and we assume this to mean that no such symptoms exist.[51]

It was only in the post-1948 period (after Stalin had aided the creation of the state of Israel with arms from his Czech puppets) that he began to speak of 'rootless cosmopolitans'. But, without minimizing his crimes, it can be accurately said that his anti-Semitism was nothing, in practice, compared to his previous ferocity toward the Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars and five other nationalities whom he deported, *en masse*, from their homelands. His outbursts about 'Trotskyite-Titoist-Zionist wreckers' were part of his general stance against all of Soviet society. Jabotinsky's play explained nothing of the actual degeneration of Communism, and was merely a Zionist rewrite of the reactionary notion that 'the more things change, the more they stay the same', no more than finger-wagging at the struggle of the various revolutionary movements struggling to bring down the Tsar and, not least of all, gain equality for the Jews and other oppressed nationalities in the empire.

The real-life Gonta's conviction that Jews could only be unsuccessful meddlers in the affairs of the nations was based on his theories of race. Schechtman simply evades this aspect of Jabotinsky's philosophy but it is dealt with by others of his epigones, notably Joseph Nedava and Oscar Rabinowicz. Nedava is the most candid, telling readers that 'Since Hitler's advent to power, the term race has been very much besmirched, but numerous philosophers who preceded Jabotinsky expounded the theory of race.'[52] Jabotinsky was indeed a believer in the 'very much besmirched' term, insisting in a letter written in 1904 that,

> the source of national feeling . . . lies in a man's blood . . . in his racio-physical type, and in that alone . . . a man's spiritual outlooks are primarily determined by his physical structure . . . For that reason we do not believe in spiritual assimilation. It is inconceivable, from the physical point of view, that a Jew born to a family of pure Jewish blood . . . can become adapted to the spiritual outlooks of a German or a Frenchman . . . He may be wholly imbued with that German fluid but the nucleus of his spiritual structure will always remain Jewish . . . The spiritual assimilation of peoples whose blood is different is impossible . . . In order to become truly assimilated he must change his body. He must become one of them in blood . . . he must bring into the world . . . over a period of many scores of years, a great-grandson in whose veins only a minute trace of Jewish blood remained . . . There can be no assimilation as long as there is no mixed marriage . . . All the nations that have disappeared (apart from those . . . who were massacred . . .) were swallowed up in the chasm of mixed marriages . . . autonomy in the Golah [exile] is likely to lead . . . to the complete disappearance of the Jewish nation as such from the face of the earth . . . Just imagine . . . when our offspring will be living at peace among a strange people . . . These conditions will lead naturally and freely to an increase in mixed marriages . . . this will mean the inception of complete assimilation . . . Without those physical roots, the spiritual flower is bound to wither . . . This will mark the end of the battle waged by the Jewish people for national existence

> . . . Only those can call themselves 'nationalists' who desire to preserve national integrity for the everlasting and at all costs . . .
>
> A preservation of national integrity is impossible except by a preservation of racial purity, and for that purpose we are in need of a territory of our own . . . If you should ask me in a sense of revolt and outrage: but surely in that case you want segregation at all costs! I would answer that one must not be afraid of words and not of the word 'segregation'. The poet, the scholar, the thinker . . . must cut himself off and remain alone with himself . . . No creativeness is possible without segregation . . . The nation, too, must create . . . a creative nation is in need of segregation . . . it will create new values in its segregation . . . it will not keep them to itself but will place them on the common international table for the general good, and so its segregation will be looked upon with favor by humanity.[53]

In 1913, in his aptly titled article '*Rasa*', he gave his answer to the vexing theoretical question of what constituted a nation:

> A nation is manifested by its own 'racial spectrum' which permeates to a greater or lesser degree, the personality of any average member of the group beneath and above the diversity of their individual physiognomies.[54]

Nations were not racially pure, all were mixtures, but in the end each nation carries with it its own substance, the

> first and last bulwark of a nation's personality – the peculiarity of its physical nature ('racial spectrum') and parallel to it its psyche . . . Some day science may achieve such refinement that it will become possible by a special analysis of the blood, or perhaps, the secret of the glands, to establish the 'spectrum' or 'recipe' of the various racial types showing all the ingredients that go into a typical Italian or an average Pole. I venture a forecast that most 'recipes' will be found to contain practically the same ingredients, only the proportion in which God and history have mixed them will prove different . . . The Irish race may contain the same ingredients as the Scottish, but their respective quantities are probably far from the same in each combination: hence the great difference between the two national characters which no observer would question.[55]

The Zionist quarrelled with the Marxist notion of historical materialism. He recognized, *in arguendo*, that societies worked within economic frameworks. But, in the final analysis, culture had to be reduced to race:

> Given a complete similarity of all other conditions – climate, soil, history – two 'races' would create two different types of economy . . . If the types of economy, its special characteristics, the social order etc., are stamped by the 'racial' psyche, it is even more so in the sphere of religion, philosophy, literature.

He was insistent. All the categories that the scholars attempted to use to define the illusive essence of nationality were, in his eyes, ultimately inadequate:

> One is therefore bound to state: Territory, language, religion, common history – all these are not the essence of a nation but its adjectives only . . . the essence of a nation, its first and last fortress of uniqueness of its image, is its distinctive physical characteristics, the compound of its racial recipe.

But there were many who assumed that the great mass migrations of the day were in fact breaking down the homogeneity of national populations. Here again Jabotinsky chose to differ. Suddenly, for polemical purpose, he assumed that the future would be socialistic. Therefore, he argued, migration would be greatly reduced as each nation would be able to solve its economic problems. It is immediately apparent that he is merely using any means to justify his *a priori* thesis that nations would not and should not ever truly merge.

> Will there ever be one herd and one shepherd? . . . when to this is added the dream of the integration of nations into one mixture, here it is already possible to state with some certainty: It shall not be . . . In such conditions the national characteristics of each closed district can only increase in 'purity' and strength, but never to the contrary . . . In this future vision in its entirety there is no prospect of integration of cultures and their mixture, but on the contrary; glorious flourishing, such as we have not witnessed yet, of each national essence in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility.[56]

Roots of Jabotinsky's Racism

It is easy to see the sources of Jabotinsky's racism. The bourgeois world of the early 20th Century was inundated by social-Darwinist theories of natural biological conflicts between races, and these ideas soon took root among the early Zionists. Although in pagan times travelling Jewish merchants made converts and took non-Jewish wives, thus adding to their strength, by the Middle Ages the church fathers began to hound the rabbis if they permitted converts from Christianity. To protect the community the Talmudists began to discourage proselytizing and eventually ordinary Jews came to see mixed-marriage as treason to Judaism and the Jews. The vast bulk of the simple folk of the *shtetls* did not need racial theories to oppose mixed-marriage and assimilation, but the new secularized intelligentsia required more than old-fashioned Talmudic exegesis. Racism poured into Zionism primarily via German Zionists, as with the early Martin Buber, who had taken over the *blut* theories of German rightism and had become *adorateurs de leur sang*, worshippers of Semitic blood, claiming that 'the deepest layers of our being are determined by blood; that our innermost thinking and our will are coloured by it.' The Jew 'was driven out of his land and dispersed throughout the lands of the

Occident . . . yet, despite all this, he remained an oriental.'[57] To the Zionist racists, the Talmudic restrictions on conversion were providential for, inadvertently of course, the restraints kept the Jews 'pure'. Such 'modern' theories provided the rationale needed for those such as Jabotinsky who sought a secular basis for their antagonism to Marxism. If the world consists of separate biological ethnic groups, each with their own genuine national soul, then assimilation could, at best, be nothing more than a put-on veneer, false to both Jews and gentile. If Jabotinsky's racial theories were correct, then the Jewish radicals were all wrong, it was not the 'Mizrachist' Zionist leaders who were the real obscurantists, it was the Marxists who were sucking internationalism out of their own holy books, while the down-to-earth Zionists like Jabotinsky realistically demanded an exclusive loyalty to the Jewish group and the products of their unique psyche.

If nations had distinctive national souls, then it followed that what culture the Jews had acquired from others was not, and could not be, Jewish. At the Helsingfors Conference, Jabotinsky had put the notion forward in straight fashion: 'In the *Galut* [exile] we don't create any values . . . one single red thread, leading from Zion to Zion, traverses the entire history of our people.'[58] Logically, therefore, Yiddish was not truly Jewish. Nahum Goldmann, later president of the WZO, gave us pre-First World War Russian Zionism's language slogan in his *Autobiography*: 'Russian or Hebrew but on no account Yiddish'.[59] Jabotinsky became, from the beginning of his organized Zionist career, totally committed to Hebrew and, by 1910, began to advocate that all Jewish education in Russia be exclusively in Hebrew. Orality had already clearly marked his career, but it was then, as his Hebraism was rising to fever pitch, that his fixation was powerfully reinforced by the devastating effects of a domestic tragedy.

On 14 October 1907 he had married Anna Markova Gelperin, the sister of a schoolfriend; they had met when he was 15 and she was ten. Extremely bourgeois, she liked being married to a financially successful writer but had no interest in Zionism and took no part in the movement until the 1930s. But she knew from the beginning that he was already married to Zionism. A son, Eri, was born on 13 December 1910 with a hare-lip and cleft-palate. Eventually operations and voice lessons overcame these defects, but it is reasonable to believe that the disaster had a chilling effect on his parents' sex life which, even before their misfortune, had been severely restricted by frequent assignments for the movement. When individuals suffer a traumatic experience in their adult sex life there is a tendency for their libidinous energy to regress to their previous point of gratification. Jabotinsky was not just an ordinary father. He was an orator language revivalist whose first-born man-child had a hare-lip and cleft-palate. His son would never, naturally, speak the language of his forefathers. Such a blow could shake anyone even though cleft-palate is, in the real world, an accident, usually non-recurrent and usually

operable. But the unconscious, by definition, is not rational. The unconscious of a man who has already composed plays, in verse no less, could without difficulty, magically compose a domestic psychodrama: the leader of his people, trying to save them from a sinful world, is suddenly punished for his sins by a terrible stigmata on the lip of his boy-child, a classic Greek tragedy. Unconsciously, the mind tries to resolve its problem; and here the unconscious does it via atonement. Jabotinsky operates on the lips of the children of Israel, undoing centuries of Yiddish to return them their true, their Holy Tongue. In the real world the fates were not punishing him, all such sins are imaginary, but the unconscious ignores this. Jabotinsky's obsession for all-Hebrew education for the children of Israel went into high gear only two weeks after his misfortune, on 29 December, when he made his first public speech in Hebrew. His libido shifted sharply away from his wife. He had already spent significant periods, weeks and months, separated from her, they were to live together only two and a half years out of the first 15 years of their marriage and only five out of the first 25 years. They had no other children, neither were there other women in his life. In later years he justified his semi-celibacy to his followers by declaring that a leader of a political movement must, like Caesar's wife, be above suspicion.[60]

It is not suggested that Eri's birth, and what we speculate occurred in his father's psyche as a result of the child's disabilities, pushed Jabotinsky in any new direction. It drove him further down his political path. He was now both a Moses and an Aaron to the unbelieving children of Israel, wandering in the desert, indifferent to the Promised Land, hankering for the fleshpots of Russia. In 1911 he wrote *The Four Sons*, a reworking of the traditional Passover *Haggadah* (tale) wherein a father answers his son's questions about the exodus from Egypt. His Hebraicist ecstasy is boundless – and unreal. He tells his reader to tell his Simple Son how, 'from day to day our pride grows . . . how beautiful our language is, how great is the happiness of a nation to have power over such a language.' He pleaded with his readers to tell their sons of the 'wonderful poets who now write in our language'. The grotesqueness of this lit-course politics is obvious if we recall the real situation of Russian Jewry in 1911 – the year Mendel Beilis was arrested on a charge of ritual murder – but the unconscious mind works along the principle of the omnipotence of words – say abracadabra and, lo presto, as Herzl insisted, 'If you will it, it is no dream.' Jabotinsky's parable ended on a soft note his readers heard but could not have understood – neither perhaps did he – consciously – understand it himself. The last son is the Son Who Does Not Know How To Enquire. In his use of the image in *The Four Sons* and elsewhere this son is the symbol for the dull masses, still sitting in the synagogues, but we can see that unconsciously he was talking to himself about Eri.

> According to tradition, you should tell this son everything he does not ask. But in my opinion, it is better for the father to keep quiet. Let him only –

> without saying a word – kiss the forehead of this son, who is the most faithful of those who guard the Holy: who does not talk about it with the lips of his mouth.[61]

For two years he waged a full-scale *sprachenkampf* up and down the Pale, giving the same speech, 'The language of our culture', over and over again, word for word, in 50 cities and towns, sometimes three or four times in one city.[62] By 1913 he showed up in Vienna for the conference of the Russian delegation to the World Zionist Congress to demand endorsement for his programme. He got it, on paper – after all, Zionism without Hebrew is a non-starter – but most leaders spoke against him. They were practical men and the implications of a full Hebrew education were enormous. There were no primers for kindergarten children, nor texts in most subjects. However, the Congress duly voted for his resolution but then did nothing to implement their decision. He had fought for the *loshn kodesh* (holy tongue) and had been finally defeated in 1915, aged 35, making his first public speech in the despised *mamaloshn fun dos Yiddisher folk*.[63] Eventually, he regularly lectured in it, but abroad, not in Russia, which was about to be closed to Jabotinsky for the last 25 years of his life.

Conclusion

Can we today applaud the role taken by Zionism in the theatre of the Romanoff empire? We cannot be kinder than its own reviewer. What Weizmann said of Herzl's cabal with Plehve applies to Russian Zionism in full sum: humiliating, pointless and disillusioning. Who today could try to justify any movement that had an audience with Louis XVI on 14 July 1789? *Ante-bellum* Zionism had the traitor's part in the revolutionary play, as insensate of the life problems of Jewry as the local Theosophists or Esperantists. Only with Zionism we hear off-stage whisperings and treacheries in the ministries of anti-Semitism. For Zionism to have ever been correct politics we must believe, *ipse dixit*, that the eventual creation of a revived Hebrew state should have been the prime political concern of flesh and blood Jews. That was nothing better than ideological future-music. Drowning swimmers need dry land, not the Holy Land. Magnification of things Jewish and of the past homeland of the Jews, tells us that we deal with philosophers intently gazing through the wrong end of the intellectual telescope. What must be said of the movement must stand for one of its leading protagonists. Goldmann summed him up quite simply and well: a monologist. The truths of politics are always as simple and common as the simple and common people. Yet fanatics of all persuasions live as if they have a superior wisdom all their own. It is obvious that people prefer to speak the tongue they already understand – which is of use to them – than the language of their ancestors 20 generations re-

moved. Such extravaganzas are the *metier* of the educated. In no country have poor Jews been the base for the Hebrew language or Zionism. Vastly more economically secure than the people, an accomplished linguist and literary wordsmith, Jabotinsky was totally estranged from the masses. Always at the podium, a *spieler*, a talker, for him Zionism was the word from on high and he was the Moses of Odessa, trying to lead a stiff-necked nation out of Egypt. In the real world he was doomed to see the educated youth of Jewry reject him and his ideas and join the ranks of the revolution.

Notes

1. Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman*, p. 66.
2. Karl Marx, *Capital* (New World Paperbacks), p. 79.
3. Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, pp. 3–10.
4. Jabotinsky, *The Story of the Jewish Legion*, p. 169.
5. Dagobert Runes (ed.), *A World Without Jews*, p. vii.
6. Bernard Goldstein, *The Stars Bear Witness*, pp. 9–10.
7. Jabotinsky, 'The Jewish State', *Current Jewish Record*, November 1931, p. 20.
8. Schechtman, *Zionism and Zionists in the Soviet Union*, p. 12.
9. Schechtman, 'Russia: Relations with Zionism and Israel', *Encyclopaedia of Zionism and Israel*, vol. II, p. 974.
10. Weizmann, p. 81.
11. *Weizmann, Letters and Papers of*, Series A, Letters II, pp. 306–9.
12. Raphael Patai (ed.), *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, vol. IV, pp. 1520–1.
13. Ibid., p. 1525.
14. Ibid., p. 1526.
15. Amos Elon, *Herzl*, p. 381.
16. Patai, p. 1538.
17. Elon, pp. 381–2.
18. Samuel Portnoy (ed.), *Vladimir Medem – The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist*, pp. 295–8.
19. Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman*, pp. 85–6.
20. Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, pp. 82–3.
21. Patai, vol. I, p. 84.
22. Schechtman, p. 90.
23. Ibid., p. 79.
24. Elias Gilner, *A History of the Jewish Legion*, p. 16.
25. Hyman Lumer (ed.), *Lenin on the Jewish Question*, pp. 111–12.
26. Ibid.
27. Georgi Gapon, *The Story of My Life*, p. 94.
28. Henry Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, p. 146.
29. Ibid., p. 141.
30. Ibid., p. 146.
31. Ibid., p. 147.

32. Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, p. 150.
33. M.M., 'Independent Jewish Workers Party', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 8, cols. 1347–8, and Y.S., 'Shochat, Mania Wilbushewitch', ibid., vol. 14, cols. 1441–2.
34. Portnoy, p. 295.
35. Jonathan Frankel, *Prophesy and Politics*, p. 168.
36. Jabotinsky, 'The Jewish State', p. 20.
37. Mendele Mocher Sforim, *Unease in Jacob*.
38. Louis Greenberg, *The Jews in Russia*, vol. II, p. 201.
39. Portnoy, p. 267.
40. Florian Sokolow, *Nahum Sokolow*, pp.100–3.
41. Getzel Kressel, 'Woffsohn, David', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 16, col. 614.
42. Emil Cohn, *David Wolffsohn*, p. 196.
43. Schechtman, pp. 97–8.
44. Portnoy, p. 354.
45. Jabotinsky, *The Jewish War Front*, p. 33.
46. Joseph Nedava, 'Jabotinsky and the Bund', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, vol. III, no. 1, p. 42.
47. Schechtman, p. 94.
48. Leon Trotsky, *1905*, pp. 131–9.
49. Lucjan Dobroszcki and Barbara Kishenblatt, *Image Before My Eyes*, p. 110.
50. Schechtman, pp. 139–41.
51. Jabotinsky, *The Jewish War Front*, p. 92.
52. Nedava, p. 45.
53. Jabotinsky, 'A Letter on Autonomy', *Israel Among the Nations* (Z. Zohar, ed.) (WZO, Jerusalem, 1966), pp. 110–17.
54. Oscar Rabinowicz, *Vladimir Jabotinsky's Conception of a Nation*, p. 28.
55. Ibid., pp. 27–9.
56. Elazer Pedazur (Gad) (ed.), *Nation and Society*, pp. 5–12.
57. Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, pp. 15–19, 75–7.
58. Schechtman, p. 115.
59. Nahum Goldmann, *Autobiography*, p. 32.
60. Schechtman, *Fighter and Prophet*, p. 500.
61. Jabotinsky, *The Four Sons*, p. 5.
62. Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman*, p. 176.
63. Schechtman, *Fighter and Prophet*, p. 545.

3. Jabotinsky in Constantinople

It was inevitable that Jabotinsky would attract the attention of the leaders of the WZO. His journalism gave him tremendous mobility. In 1907 he was able to spend a year in Vienna studying the literature on nationalism. He was fluent in several languages and could write in others. Marriage was not an obstacle to his political activities. But the most important of his assets was that, as a convinced opponent of popular revolution, at least for Jews, he shared their central conviction that there was only one route open for Zionism: diplomatic intrigue with the powers that be.

The Importance of Turkey

In the winter of 1908–9 he was able to convince the editors of the daily *Rus* to send him to Constantinople. The Young Turks' military coup naturally created immense interest in Russia, long the enemy of the tottering Ottoman Empire. As a Zionist, Jabotinsky had his own reasons for wanting to do an in-depth study of Palestine's new suzerains. Whilst in Turkey he took the opportunity to make a trip to Palestine; it was his first visit there and, strangely enough for one so involved with Zionism, the trip had little impact on him from either a personal or political standpoint. He barely touched on it in his writings – throughout his life his emotions were more involved with Odessa than Palestine. The intense concern for being Jewish was what directly evolved from his childhood family drama and it was Zionism, Jewish nationalism, that was injected with his emotions rather than Palestine. Palestine in 1908–9 could not provide him with a livelihood as a litterateur, certainly nothing that would satisfy his wife Anna, and he had no choice but to return to Constantinople. He liked two things about Palestine: Hebrew was an on-the-ground reality, and the colonialists were not afraid of the Arabs and were prepared to defend themselves against the banditry that plagued the countryside.

The Young Turks were eager to convince the outside world that better times were ahead for their Christian subjects and he had no difficulty supplying his paper with interviews. His articles impressed the Russian Zionist leaders. They decided he was the ideal person to propagandize

the Zionist cause among the new ruling circles, and they persuaded Wolffsohn to employ him in June 1909 as the director of a greatly expanded Zionist press campaign at the Golden Horn.

Herzl's Tactics in the Ottoman Empire

From the beginning Herzl knew Zionism's destiny was intertwined with the fate of the Osmanlis. It was the obviously terminal illness of the 'sick man of Europe' that gave Zionism its initial air of plausibility. He simultaneously sought to convince potential European imperial patrons that Zionism would be their cat's-paw in Palestine, come the partition of the relic Islamic domain while, at the same time, he tried to show the Yildiz Kiosk that he and his movement could help prop up the ramshackle Turkish state. Scheming with Europe had to be secret if his pro-Turkish ploy was to succeed but his Ottomania had to be strident for him to hope to gull Abdul Hamid II. What he proposed reduced Jewish nationalism to the level of a Shylock operation: if Abdul Hamid would give Palestine to the Zionists as an autonomous vassal statelet, Jewish high finance would, he assured the Caliph, solve the problems of his imperial exchequer by paying off its crushing foreign debts.

The Sultan was not the least bit interested: autonomy, he knew, was bound to lead to eventual independence. If he granted it to the Jews who were a tiny minority in Palestine, he could hardly deny it to the Christian nations in his imperial museum. Through an intermediary he told his Zionist supplicant that the Jews should save their money: 'When my empire is divided, perhaps they will get Palestine for nothing. But only our corpse can be divided. I will never consent to vivisection.'[1]

The Armenian Massacres

Before long, Turkish diplomacy realized that Herzl could be put into harness; they had what he wanted. Could they play on his naivete, tempting him with future possibilities? Could they get him to prove his devotion to their cause in the here and now? In 1896 the Caliph's prime concern was to get the European powers, and their press, to look the other way while he continued butchering the Armenians. Compared to the Armenian massacres the Russian pogroms were amateur theatricals. Very few Jews had actually been killed in the pogrom years 1881–4[2] while an Armenian atrocity often ran to thousands killed. In 1896–7 it is estimated that Abdul Hamid put to death between 80,000 and 200,000 of his helpless subjects. Could Herzl get Jewish-owned papers and Jewish journalists to turn a blind eye to his treatment of the Armenians? Would he be willing to try to get the Armenians to call off their struggle for life and freedom? In June 1896, Herzl went to Constantinople hoping to have an audience with Hamid. He was informed by an agent of the Sultan that this would be impossible – Herzl worked for the *Neue Frei Presse* which

had just attacked his exalted person. But, wrote Herzl in his *Diary*,

> he could and would receive me as a friend – after I had rendered him a service. The service he asks of me is this: For one thing, I am to influence the European press (in London, Paris, Berlin and Vienna) to handle the Armenian question in a spirit more friendly to the Turks; for another, I am to induce the Armenian leaders directly to submit to him, whereupon he will make all sorts of concessions to them . . . I immediately told Newlinski that I was ready *à me mettre en campagne* [to start my campaign].[3]

Herzl went to London to meet Avetis Nazarbekian, the leader of the Henshags, the Armenian Social-Revolutionaries. The Zionist told their go-between:

> I want to make it clear to this revolutionary that the Armenians should now make their peace with the Sultan, without prejudice to their later claims when Turkey is partitioned.[4]

On 13 July Herzl met the Armenian:

> I promised I would try to get the Sultan to stop the massacres and new arrests, as a token of his good will. But he would hardly release the prisoners in advance, as Nazarbek desired. I explained to him in vain that, after all, the revolutionaries could watch the course of the peace negotiations without disarming, with their guns at their feet.[5]

The War with Greece and Efforts in Italy

Herzl's failure with the Armenians did not discourage him. On 17 April 1897, Turkey went to war with Greece in retaliation for Athens having backed the liberation struggle of their co-nationals on Crete. He jumped at the chance to publicly show the Porte that Zionism could be of assistance to Turkey. He wrote to Mahmud Nedim Pasha on 28 April:

> I beg to congratulate Your Excellency on the splendid victories of Turkish arms. The desire of several Jewish students to attach themselves voluntarily to the armed forces of His Majesty the Sultan is a small token of the friendship and gratitude which we Jews feel for Turkey. Here and in several other places I have organized committees to initiate collections of money for wounded Turkish soldiers.[6]

Herzl was wasting his time. Nothing could convince the Turks to give him Palestine, but officially Herzl maintained his open pro-Sultan policy. Behind the scenes, however, he showed no such loyalty. He met King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy on 23 January 1904, and asked him to personally intervene with Abdul Hamid on behalf of an autonomous Zionist Palestine. In return he offered to help the Italians take Libya:

And finally I broached my Tripoli scheme also: 'to channel the surplus Jewish immigration into Tripolitania, under the liberal laws and institutions of Italy'.

'*Ma e ancora casa di altri*' (But that again is someone else's house), he said.

'But the partition of Turkey is bound to come, Your Majesty.'[7]

Zionist Policy with the New Regime

The ascension to power of the Young Turks rekindled all the old Zionist illusions of gaining their aspirations through patient work with the rulers at Constantinople, and their Political Bureau there worked hard. For Turkish officialdom and the educated Jews, they took over a French daily, the *Jeune Turc*, and a weekly, *L'Aurore*. For Ladino-speaking Jewry they set up *El Judeo – ha-Hehudi*, and though there were no Hebrew speakers in the empire outside Palestine, for prestige reasons they set up a Hebrew weekly, *Ha-Mevasser*. Jabotinsky wrote in French and Hebrew and supervised the entire operation. He lectured tirelessly; he won over two Jewish members of the Turkish parliament and his efforts were successful in all respects except the most important: the Turks were still not interested in handing over Palestine to the World Zionist Organization. Jews would be welcomed as immigrants in Macedonia where the Turks, hard pressed by the Rum, the Christian Bulgarians, Greeks, Macedonians and Serbs, were eager to see more non-Christians, but the Turks had no interest in encouraging Jews to settle in Palestine. The Jews who did in fact emigrate to Palestine were, in theory, only admitted for a three-month stay and newcomers were forbidden to buy land. In reality, the local administration looked the other way, bribery ensured that there was no enforcement of the time limitations. The Turks had real problems and Zionism was not seen as a serious danger. Zionism was really in a limbo in Turkish politics but it hardly mattered. They could always assume that the empire would continue to disintegrate and that one day they would come into their own through machinations with the other imperialists.

Jabotinsky had orders from Wolffsohn to push a very soft line to the new masters of Turkey: Zionism did not mean a Jewish state, only free immigration to Palestine and cultural autonomy. But suddenly, without warning to either Wolffsohn or the Constantinople office, Jacobus Kann, a banker who administered the finances of the Dutch royal family, and a member of the Actions Committee, published a travelogue, in German, of his recent trip to Palestine. In it, he reiterated the traditional Herzlian line that Turkey should set up an autonomous Zionist state there. He began to send copies to Turkish politicians. Everyone in the Constantinople office was understandably nervous – Turkey was now ruled under martial law – if that was thought to be an official policy, Turkish Zionists

felt they could be in danger of their lives. The Constantinople office warned Wolffsohn that the entire chapter of Kann's book on Zionist aspirations had to be taken out – the Turks would not believe a purely formal repudiation of Kann's thinking. Wolffsohn, safe in Cologne, had no conception of the possible danger the Constantinople Zionists faced, and refused to discipline Kann. By February 1910 the Constantinoplites were in a state of severe panic and demanded nothing less than Kann's resignation. Wolffsohn would not hear of any such thing, and by May, Jabotinsky decided he could no longer continue his work as long as Kann's statements hung over his head, and he resigned.

Wolffsohn was fortunate in that nothing untoward happened as a result of Kann's indiscretion. Probably by then the Turks were accustomed to Europeans dissecting their decaying empire, and felt they had nothing to fear from the Zionists. In Palestine, Zionism was an ineffectual force compared to the Turkish presence there and, more important, the Zionist movement was one of the few non-Turkish political factors in the empire that was not in revolt. On the contrary, in 1911 the WZO supported Turkey against the invading Italians in Libya and again in the two Balkan Wars of 1912–13.[8] In the 1912 elections for the Ottoman parliament, the Palestinian Zionists supported the ruling Unity and Progress Party.[9] David Ben-Gurion, Itzhak Ben-Zvi, Moshe Sharett and Israel Shochat (Manya Wilbushevich's husband) duly went off to study law at the University of Constantinople in preparation for careers in Turkish politics.[10]

End of the Ottoman Empire

Zionism was increasingly loyal to Turkey until after the outbreak of World War I. But Jabotinsky was unique within the movement: while there is no sign that he did anything to warn the WZO leadership, he seems to have been the only leading Zionist who understood that the Ottoman Empire could not possibly survive a war with any major power, and that fact became the guiding star of his politics during the war. In his post-war book, *The Story of the Jewish Legion*, he wrote about his conception of the Turkish reality:

> I am at a loss to understand how anyone could have had any doubts on the subject . . . that Turkey more than anyone else would have to pay for this war. I did not and could not doubt for one moment. Stone and iron can endure a fire; a wooden hut must burn, and no miracle will save it.[11]

He was, of course, quite correct about Turkey's fate but, as he writes, this was an elementary matter: the fact that he foresaw it serves to emphasize not his far-sightedness but rather the short-sightedness of the Zionist movement as a whole. An explanation for their collective folly is perhaps to be found in Zionism's general acceptance of the powers that be, the automatic reflex of a counter-revolutionary movement which, as

part of its running argument with revolution, must deceive itself as to the strength of the opponents of revolution.

It was Jabotinsky's ability to see the implications for Zionism of the inevitable death of the Turkish Empire that was, with the coming of the war, to lead to Zionism's first and most important political breakthrough, the Balfour Declaration, and Jabotinsky's own rise to the top ranks of the WZO. It was thus that his Turkish interlude, half forgotten on his return to Russia, and his campaign for Hebrew, turned out to have been, in the end, far more productive than his millions of words wasted in his quixotic endeavours. We learn a great truth here: Zionism's connection to reality lies not in its pretences towards being some kind of reflection of the concerns of the Jewish masses, but rather that, as we shall see, Zionism could be useful as a cat's-paw for the victorious imperialism in its designs in the Middle East.

Crime of the WZO

It is not enough to say that Zionism was ultra-imperialist in its pro-Turkish policies: there was more than an element of insanity involved. It would have occurred to no one else in the broad Jewish world to have tried to hinder or interfere with the Armenians in their struggle; nor would anyone have thought to support Turkey in any of its wars, and in the end Zionism gained nothing by its actions. But what was demonstrated, early in its history, was that there were no criteria of ordinary humanism that the WZO considered itself bound to respect. The advancement of the cause of a Jewish state was, to the WZO, the Alpha and Omega of life. If thousands of Arabs and Jews unnecessarily slaughtered in its wars are its gravest atrocity; we would propose the WZO's pro-Turkish diplomacy as one of its crimes. Certainly, any modern Zionist who attempted to defend its policy before an Armenian audience would be courting violence. That fact, for such it surely is, tells more of the utter lack of elementary integrity inherent in the Zionist philosophy than all the polemics on the subject of a Jewish state ever written.

Notes

1. Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, p. 108.
2. 'Russia', *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14, col. 443.
3. Patai (ed.), *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, p. 387.
4. Ibid., p. 415.
5. Ibid., pp. 417–18.
6. Ibid., p. 541.
7. Ibid., p. 1600.
8. Eliazer Livneh, 'Germany: Relations with Zionism and Israel', *Encyclopaedia of Zionism and Israel*, vol. I, p. 383.
9. Laqueur, p. 223.
10. Moshe Perlman, *Ben-Gurion Looks Back*, pp. 43–7.
11. Jabotinsky, *Story of the Jewish Legion*, p. 30.

4. Collaborating with Tsarism and British Imperialism

The First World War and the Jewish Legion

It is difficult to say with certainty exactly how Jabotinsky saw the outbreak of war in August 1914. In 1934 he wrote that he wished for a Russian defeat. But earlier, in 1928, in his *Story of the Jewish Legion*, he had already stated that he was indifferent to either side. For Jabotinsky the war did not really begin until 29 October, when two German ships attached to the Turkish fleet shelled Odessâ. With Turkey now in the war it had meaning from his Zionist perspective. Convinced the Ottomans would not survive, he understood that Zionism's hour had come. He was determined that the movement would be in at the kill. His scheme was quite simple: he would establish a Jewish Legion to fight for the British in their inevitable invasion of Palestine.

Russian Support for the Legion

He convinced a Russian paper to send him from France to North Africa to see what reaction there would be to the Sultan's call for the world's Muslims to back him in the war. There was, as he expected, not the slightest bit of pan-Islamic sentiment. But his trip turned out to be providential from a Zionist standpoint. He arrived in Alexandria in December, just in time to learn that the Turks had just expelled 11,000 Russian Zionists from Palestine. They had done nothing to deserve their fate; in fact Palestinian Zionism had rushed to the support of the Turks; Ben-Gurion and Shochat and their friends had offered to set up a Zionist militia to police the country – which would have freed Turkish troops for duty elsewhere. But Jamal Pasha, the military governor, would have none of it, and Shochat, the organizer of the *HaShomer* (Watchmen), and his wife Wilbushevich, were banished to Anatolia, while Ben-Gurion was summarily deported. It is difficult to explain the Turks' actions except in general terms. A regime as tyrannical as that of Muhammed V, who exceeded all his predecessors' anti-Armenian atrocities – hundreds of thousands were killed in the greatest single genocide of modern times prior to Hitler – does not act rationally. The affair, however, demonstrates the naivety of Palestinian Zionism in trying to link itself to the decaying Turkish tyranny.

Technically, the new exiles were now subject to the Russian draft, and the British, legally, should have helped their ally, but the Russian consul's threats in the matter were only bluffs. He knew well enough that in 1913, when he had tried to have the British arrest a wanted revolutionary, 10,000 Egyptian Jews had rioted, and the British had to drop the matter. Jabotinsky's Legion proposal would save his face. The Russians were not too keen on the idea of the Zionists serving in their army, and were overjoyed to see Jews leave their empire for good, but could not admit this diplomatically. Now a Zionist came along with a proposition that would simultaneously keep *émigré* Jews out of their hair while still having them fight the enemies of the Tsar. The consul gave his backing to the Legion.

British Response: the Mule Corps

The British were somewhat more reluctant to go along. Their army had plenty of colonial troops but Westminster had no interest in anything along the lines of the French Foreign Legion. There was no conscription yet in Britain and Lord Kitchener saw the Turkish front as peripheral, and had no plans then for a Palestine offensive. At last it was agreed that the refugees could set up a Zion Mule Corps as a logistics outfit, but with the understanding that they would have to fight on any front required.

Jabotinsky and his friends discussed the British proposal at length; he finally decided that he could not accept it. What he had in mind was a gallant army, something that would attract Jews on a nationalist basis to aid in the conquest of their ancestral land. Now all he was offered was a non-combatant work unit compelled to labour on any remote front. And the name! A mule is half a donkey; a Zion Mule Corps sounded ridiculous. But hundreds of refugees decided to accept. After all, what difference did it make on what front they fought the Turks? Besides, in wartime there is no hard and fast line between military elements, they would be certain to receive military training and see combat. In the end, 562 of the Muleteers fought at Gallipoli.

World Jewish Reaction to the War

The immense majority of the world's Jews were either pro-German or were socialists opposed to both the Entente and the Central Powers. In Britain and France, the native Jews identified with their country of birth, but the far larger immigrant group, fresh from the Tsarist prison, saw Britain and France strictly as the Tsar's allies, and opposed the war from its onset. In America as well, the millions of newcomers favoured staying out of the war and many cheered the German victory at Tannenburg and the subsequent German advances into Poland and Lithuania. Certainly, in Russia itself the vast majority of Jews were opposed to the war effort and with perfect reason. The defeated generals had to explain to themselves and the public why their armies had been crushed, and they quickly blamed it all on the hapless Jews, claiming they were all German spies.

Soon, Jews were being officially executed as German agents, and pogroms became commonplaces of Russian military life. Eventually, about 600,000 Jews were deported eastwards out of the Pale, and only the rapid advances of the Germans saved still more from the same fate. Under the circumstances, most Russian Zionists shared the universal hatred of the war, and wished nothing more than speedy deliverance and the appearance of the Teutonic saviours.

The WZO was officially neutral, an office was opened in Copenhagen, but the vital *AktionsKomitee* stayed in Berlin, and there is no doubt that the top leaders wanted the Germans to win. Of the central figures, only Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow were pro-Allies.[1] The WZO still did not realize that the Ottoman dynasty was doomed; still less that the Hohenzollern would also be driven from his throne. They used the German government as an intercessor with the Turks for more merciful treatment for Russian Zionists in Palestine. It was in Germany's interests to help them: world opinion condemned Berlin for its failure to intervene when its Islamic friends destroyed the Armenian community, and helping the Jews went far to atone for their previous silence – at least in the eyes of some Jewish journalists in America, which the Wilhelmstrasse still hoped to keep out of the European mêlée. The WZO was allowed to use the German diplomatic pouch in communicating with the Political Bureau in Constantinople and the movement in Palestine, as their reward for keeping the central office in Berlin.[2]

Jabotinsky tried to convince the WZO to back the Legion idea, travelling to Copenhagen to put his case, but the results were exactly the opposite of what he had hoped. The Actions Committee voted to repudiate all Legion propaganda: they feared the Turks would retaliate on what was left of the Zionist community in Palestine. The full degree of Jabotinsky's commitment to the Legion may be gauged by the fact that it was in Malmö, Sweden, of all places, that the fanatic opponent of Yiddish reluctantly gave his first public speech – on the Legion – in the hated language.[3]

Discussions in Russia

He went on from Scandinavia to Russia in the summer of 1915. By July the government had outlawed, for the first time, the use of Hebrew characters, thus wiping out the Hebrew and Yiddish press. Under those circumstances he could have no success convincing the local Zionist leaders to back his ideas. They were bourgeois patriots in reverse – they did nothing to organize a Jewish underground to fight the new repression, putting their entire hopes on a German victory. They also feared the effect his efforts would have on the safety of their friends in Palestine. But even if he was called a traitor by his erstwhile comrades, he was a success with the Tsarist officialdom. He realized, soon enough, that he had made a mistake over the issue of the Mules. The Foreign Ministry in St Petersburg had heard about them from their man in Alexandria and were

impressed. At the time, Jabotinsky did not dare discuss his connections with the regime, but later he wrote of them quite openly in his book:

> It was that 'donkey battalion' from Alexandria, ridiculed by all wits in Israel, which opened before me the doors of the government offices in Whitehall. The Minister of Foreign Affairs in St Petersburg wrote about it to Count Benkendorf, the Russian Ambassador in London; the Russian Embassy forwarded reports on it to the British Foreign Office; the chief Counsellor of the Embassy, the late Constantine Nabokov, who afterward succeeded the Ambassador, arranged for my meetings with British Ministers.[4]

Was Jabotinsky a paid agent of the Tsar? There is no evidence that he was, nor that he ever took money from anyone in his career. Later, he defended his collaboration with the Romanoffs by misapplying Mazzini's maxim. He was merely extending the logic of his previous defence of Herzl's role *vis-à-vis* Plehve. He could also point to the crimes of the Turks against the *Yishuv* (settlement), and to the fact that he had to take advantage of his certainty that they were going to be beaten in any circumstances. But he did become far more than a propagandist for his own Legionnaire cause. The British were compelled by the Russians to publicly declare their support for a Russian takeover at Constantinople. Not only Jews and leftists, but even many British imperialists, as well as the Greeks, thought this was giving the incompetents in St Petersburg far more than they deserved. Jabotinsky worked to break down public resistance to the takeover. In his 1917 thesis-book *Turkey and the War*, essentially an intellectual absurdity which proclaimed the Turkish problem to have been the central issue of the war, he politely but bluntly told his hoped for imperial patrons:

> We do, however, notice even now a strong instinctive aversion in the average English mind to Russia having Constantinople and the Straits. It is time to insist upon a fair and thorough revision of this hereditary feeling.[5]

Even though the Russians had proven their incompetence in the war against Japan, and he had personally seen the intense opposition of the workers to the regime, Jabotinsky was completely convinced that the empire would expand to conquer Galicia from the Hapsburgs. The Tsarists did not merely organize sporadic pogroms on their invasion of the province, they summarily removed all Jews from elected posts in the conquered municipalities, and Jabotinsky predicted that the Jews of Constantinople as well would lose their rights for the next 30 years.[6] He saw the weaknesses of the Ottomans, and he fought them, because he wanted them to fall in the interests of Zionism. He ignored the equally obvious weaknesses of the Romanoffs, which he saw again first hand on his 1915 trip through the empire, because he wanted their support for

Zionism. The *axis mundi* of his Zionism was that the Jews could not solve the problem of anti-Semitism in the Diaspora, therefore the re-creation of a Jewish state was the most important thing in Jewish life. He has to be seen as an intelligent fanatic: his understanding of general politics was *de minimis*; he did read on other topics besides Jews, but Jewish preoccupations and literary and linguistic interests consumed so much of his time that he really did not seriously study general political affairs. No one would think today of republishing his opinions on a single political question not touching on his narrow Zionist speciality. To him, the land of Israel was more important than the people Israel. In his post-war book on the Legion he expressed his feelings quite candidly:

> As I saw it, the matter was crystal clear: the fate of the Jews in Russia, Poland, Galicia, very important undoubtedly, was, if viewed in the historical perspective only, something temporary as compared to the revolution in Jewish national life which the dismemberment of Turkey would bring us.[7]

His desire for a Turkish defeat led him, inexorably, into favouring a Russian victory. On 21 January 1917, only a little over a month before the fall of the Tsar, he handed in the final manuscript of his *Turkey and the War*. In it he wrote of the Russian front:

> Even there, we hope, Germany will no more be given the opportunity of administering dangerous strokes, and perhaps some day we shall yet witness a revival of the Russian offensive.[8]

Although he had no reason to know it then, when he left Russia in August 1915 he was never to see it again. He had what he needed to convince the British to set up the Legion: the backing of the Tsarists.

Britain and the Petition Campaign for the Legion

The anti-Semitism of their Russian allies had become a distinct liability to the British government both at home and abroad. Britain's sons were being slaughtered in the trenches, but there were thousands of young Russian Jews walking the streets of London. Theoretically, the government could have permitted the Russian army to set up units in Britain (as they were to allow the Poles in World War II), or they could have tried to deport the Jews to Russia by way of Scandinavia, but the politicians did not dare to implement such brazen policies. These Jews had migrated from their homeland to get away from anti-Semitism, and under no circumstances would they fight for the pogrom regime. Even many British reactionaries sympathized with them. What Jabotinsky offered the authorities was a partial solution to their dilemma. If they set up a Legion they would get some of the youths off the streets and into uniform. There was only one small problem: the Jews were no more interested in dying for Russia's ally than they were in fighting in the Tsar's army. A substan-

tial element in the London Jewish community had become highly radicalized as a result of their experience in Russia, and as a result had no illusions about the true nature of British imperialism or capitalism in general. From the moment he started publicly advocating the Legion, the Jewish masses bitterly opposed him. Later, Jabotinsky admitted that 'everybody's main concern was not to be drafted and the man who wanted them to join the Jewish Legion was enemy Number One'.[9]

Jabotinsky tried to build Jewish support for the Legion idea with a petition campaign, but this proved to be a failure. In his unpublished biographical notes he later wrote that the affair 'ended in riots, disgrace, and failure'.[10] Without the threat of conscription facing them – not being British subjects it did not apply to them – it was impossible to con the Jewish workers into volunteering to die in an imperialist war.

In his book, Jabotinsky accused Georgi Chicherin, later to become the second Soviet Commissar of Foreign Affairs, of mobilizing the *émigré* left against him. There was no doubt of the effectiveness of the disruption. His first public meeting was quiet, but only because the leftists assumed there were police lying in wait. When they realized that Jabotinsky and his few friends were acting alone they starting coming 30 at a time with whistles. Eventually, the Legion rallies ended in brawls, with Jabotinsky getting his glasses smashed and having to flee his last lecture with irate workers at his heels.[11]

After the Gallipoli disaster, the Mules had been returned to Alexandria and demobilized, but 120 re-enlisted in late 1916 and were brought to Britain, where they were assigned to the 20th London Battalion. Jabotinsky joined them as a private in January 1917. But without conscription there could be no Legion. Jabotinsky's break came, paradoxically, as a result of the overthrow of the Tsar whom he had assumed would be one of the war's victors. The new government was determined to stay in the war, and now that official anti-Semitism was abolished, the St Petersburg government dared to politically risk backing conscription for its subjects in Britain. The Ambassador called in Jabotinsky for a consultation:

> Among the foreign Jews there are two opinions. One is that of the majority in Whitechapel – No. The other is that of my friends and myself – Yes . . . It is foolish to expect Whitechapel suddenly to display a desire for war . . . when the ordinary Britisher has already lost such a desire.[12]

In August, Jabotinsky got what he wanted: conscription of his fellow Russian Jews and, on 23 August, the official establishment of the Legion. Recruiting rallies were started again. This time, with the Legion now having official backing, and 60 former Mules acting as a protection force, the meetings were not disturbed. But the Legion was always opposed by the immense majority of the Russian Jews in Britain. Only a few hundred chose to join the outfit on their own, most of the 38th Royal Fusiliers were

draftees who loathed Jabotinsky for his support of conscription. Over 20,000 Jews chose to repatriate to the new Russia rather than serve in the imperialist army.[13]

The Balfour Declaration

The British did not suddenly become pro-Zionist out of philo-Semitism. They finally decided to back the Legion, and, in November, issued the Balfour Declaration, announcing their intention to set up a 'national home' for the Jews in Palestine, out of what they thought of as necessity. In 1936, David Lloyd George, the prime minister at the time of the decision to patronize Zionism, revealed cabinet opinion in 1917:

> The French army had mutinied, the Italian army was on the eve of collapse and America had hardly started preparing in earnest . . . It was important for us to seek every legitimate help we could get. We came to the conclusion, from information we received from every part of the world, that it was vital we should have the sympathies of the Jewish community . . . They were helpful in America and in Russia, which at that moment was just walking out and leaving us alone.[14]

The overthrow of the Tsar, and the Balfour Declaration, reorientated the leadership of the WZO. Although the German Zionists never stopped trying, as the 'good Germans' they really were, to get the Kaiser and the Sultan to match the British ploy, most Zionists now suddenly saw the virtues of the British Empire and did all they could to help the Entente. The Po'ale Zionists, who had originally tried to build a Legion for the Turks, and then had shifted, at least in America, into an anti-war position, now became recruiting agents for Britain in America, calling for Jewish blood for the realization of 'our holy ideal'.[15] By the end of the war, approximately 11,000 men served in the Legion, with 34% coming from the United States; 30% joined up when the Legion arrived in Palestine; 6% came from Canada; 1% from Argentina; and only 28% from Britain, with most of these being conscripts. (Approximately 560 volunteered for the Mules, 1,500 served in the invasion, 5,000 were part of the post-war occupation and another 5,000 were in training when the war ended.)

Yosef Trumpeldor, the prime organizer of the Mules, went back to Russia to try to convince the Kerensky government to set up a Jewish army of 75,000 men to fight on the Caucasian front. They were to fight their way through Turkish Armenia and Mesopotamia and then end up in Palestine. Trumpeldor even got assent in principle from Kerensky for his fantasy. His hoped-for army vanished into history with the Bolshevik revolution. In the end, British imperialism gained little from their arrangement with the Zionists: America got into, and Russia out of, the war – neither acknowledging the role of the Zionists. In practical terms,

the Balfour Declaration and the Legion gained them 5,000 troops, nothing more – and the enmity of the Arab world.

The Legion in Palestine

The Legion saw little combat. They arrived in Palestine in June 1918 and spent the summer in the hills near Nablus. Jabotinsky, by this time a lieutenant, led night patrols through the bush and occupied a deserted village. His men were sent to the Jordan valley for seven weeks – he described the heat there as purgatory and Gehenna – and finally, on 23 September, his company took the Jordan River ford at Umm-esh-Shert from the retreating Turks. In Jabotinsky's account of his adventures malaria seems to have been more of an enemy than the outclassed Turks. Jabotinsky never pretended that his personal role, or that of the Legion, was more than it was. It was hardly their fault if they had no more of a part in the conquest, they were only a small contingent in Allenby's army. We focus on them today because we know the future history of the country, but for Allenby, then, they were just another detachment. The Italians insisted on having 1,000 troops in on the taking of the country, so as to protect their interests. There was an Armenian contingent, and the Arabs under Lawrence were a vital part of Allenby's strategic thinking. He was conquering Palestine for Britain. The Balfour Declaration was just another piece of diplomacy, nothing more.

To Jabotinsky, the real role of the Legion could only begin after the Turks were driven out. Jabotinsky was a conscious and consistent colonialist. The Turks would go but then there would be the Arabs. If the Zionists were going to play a part in military affairs they would have to at least assist in the garrisoning of the place. Here begins his lamentations. The British officialdom on the spot had no sympathy for the national home. From the beginning they would not let the Legion into Jerusalem. They had not asked for a Jewish Legion. They were of the 'Cairo school', Arabists, their 'Legion' the forces of Faisal, the son of the Sherif of Mecca, whose bands performed the crucial service of cutting the Damascus-Hejaz railway, thus hopelessly isolating the Turks and demoralizing their German specialists. The British army had no need for the Legion's future services now that the war was over; no further concern about American and Russian Jewry's attitudes troubled the British government, and they started to demobilize the Legion. Jabotinsky fought a hopeless rearguard action to keep his unit together but it was doomed from the start. The men in the unit, mostly from London's East End, were not interested in the Land of their Forefathers, all they wanted was to get back to their families, unlike Jabotinsky, who saw himself as a Jewish crusader knight, eternally at the watch. They understood he was a powerful *spieler* but they saw the Palestinian Zionists, as Jabotinsky had to admit, 'simply as fools', and Palestine itself as a back of beyond, as probably any Londoners would have done.[16] The Americans, despite being recent immigrants there, were equally eager to go home. The

Palestinians were cult-like Po'alist earth-therapists: they saw the Arabs as the early Americans saw the Indians, fighting was inevitable, but they would fight them as farmers not as the 7th Cavalry. Thus, they too wanted to be demobbed, but in Palestine, immediately, so that they could take part in the pioneering opportunities opened up by the elimination of the Turks. Certainly Jabotinsky, never one to do anything by halves, did nothing to endear himself or the Legion idea to the troops by his fanatical spit-and-polish mentality. His men had grown up in the *shtetl* with its squalor, but Jabotinsky had developed into a heel-clicking martinet. He was unable to grasp that being an enlisted man was unpalatable to anyone used to the dishabille many Jews then took for granted.

The Legion staggered on but the men grew more and more unruly. At a meeting in the summer of 1919 he warned them that the Legion was vital to the colonization of the country, the Arabs did not believe that the Indian troops, mostly Muslims, who made up about half of the garrison, would fight them to protect infidel Jews but he only infuriated the men by anathemizing all who wanted to abandon the Legion as 'traitors to their people'.[17] By then, looked upon as a meddling busybody by the British and a crank militarist by his own troops, Jabotinsky still failed to recognize the fact that his usefulness was over. He was saved from complete repudiation by his own men by the decision of the army to demobilize him in August 1919, after 30 months' service. He fought the order to the end, but was told that if he did not accept immediately the army would have no choice but to discipline him.

Significance of the War and Jabotinsky's Endeavours

From then on, Jabotinsky's militarism would always be private and political; in his enforced retirement we see the beginning of his entire future relationship to the British: to their right.

The veterans of the Legion always referred to it as the 'forgotten Jewish army', and for the world at large World War I has become the forgotten 'great war'. In the US the 'Uncle Sam Wants You!' recruitment posters have served as material for two generations of cartoonists. But the historians have not yet done enough to make today's literate public fully understand that World War I signified the breakdown, perhaps the beginning of the end, of our industrial civilization. Though the leaders of all the warring states, not merely the losers, seem to us to be so many museum-pieces, there is something missing in our dismissal of the First World War leaders as quaint portraits in an old rotogravure. Our mood-feeling had detached itself from the reality of the war to 'make the world safe for democracy'. Lloyd George was a murderer: the allies as well as the Central Powers slaughtered between 10 and 13 million souls, all for one and the same purpose: to make the ruling element of their state so much the richer. Much has happened since, monstrous things that would have made even some of them blench, but each and every surviving institution that endorsed that carnage – as with the Republican and

Democratic parties in America, the Tories and the Liberals in Britain, all the social democratic parties that abandoned internationalism for social-patriotism, marked themselves for ever as betrayers of civilization. It is crucial to realize that not a single one of these factors has redeemed themselves in the succeeding years. A crime of such magnitude grew out of the grim reality that these factions represent classes fundamentally antiquated and antagonistic to the interests of humanity. To this moment the surviving institutions responsible for what seems so much a part of the dead and gone past still act, without shame, against the masses in the modern world. So too with Zionism which, through Jabotinsky's Legion, harnessed itself to the juggernaut of imperial carnage.

There is only one word that can be accurately used to describe Jabotinsky during the War: a traitor. To the Jews of Russia, to the Jews of Britain, to democracy, to liberty, to humanity. That a Jew who collaborates with a government while it hangs Jews *qua* Jews on bogus spy charges is a renegade is so apparent that it requires no further elaboration. So too was the Jabotinsky who collaborated with the British in dragooning the workers of the East End. And finally the Jabotinsky who collaborated with the British Empire in the conquest of Arab Palestine, was likewise a traitor: to democracy, to the right of each and every nation to self-determination. That he did all this for an ideological cause rather than for base coin, as with the Lloyd Georges and the rich of the several empires, changes nothing and justifies nothing. He was a fanatic, prepared to traffic with the enemies of his people for the sake of what he saw as more important than their rights or even their lives. When his present-day followers tell us that he was a Zionist hero, a nation-builder required to use the powers that be for his purpose, all they are doing, in actuality, is giving us advance warning that they, like him, are prepared to betray humanity for the sake of their Zionist state.

Notes

1. Livneh, 'Germany: Relations with Zionism and Israel', *Encyclopaedia of Zionism and Israel*, Vol. I, p. 383.
2. Ibid., p. 384.
3. Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman*, p. 214.
4. Jabotinsky, *Story of the Jewish Legion*, p. 74.
5. Jabotinsky, *Turkey and the War*, p. 171.
6. Schechtman, p. 229.
7. Jabotinsky, *Story of the Jewish Legion*, p. 30.
8. Jabotinsky, *Turkey and the War*, p. 252.
9. Schechtman, p. 224.
10. Ibid., p. 232.
11. Ibid.
12. Jabotinsky, *Story of the Jewish Legion*, pp. 91–2.

13. Simcha Flapan, *Zionism and the Arabs*, p. 102.
14. 'Great Britain – The Emancipator of Arabia and Mesopotamia – Lloyd George', *Palestine Post*, 26 June 1936.
15. Joseph Rappaport, 'Zionism as a Factor in Allied–Central Power Controversy (1914–18)', *Early History of Zionism in America*, p. 298.
16. Jabotinsky, *Story of the Jewish Legion*, p. 160.
17. Schechtman, p. 276.

5. The Founder of the Haganah

Zionism After the First World War

Discharge from the army found Jabotinsky free of all responsibilities in the Zionist movement. While still in the military he had also acted as the political representative of the Zionist Commission set up as their liaison between the British and the Jewish communities of the Allied countries. But it rapidly became clear that his conception of what the relationship should be between Zionism and Britain differed so fundamentally from Weizmann's that he had to be relieved of his post even before his discharge from the army. Jabotinsky was always for pressing London on every question for maximum concessions; Weizmann's strategy was exactly the opposite.

Few political movements of this century have had a long-term leader as moderate as Weizmann. He was in no rush; the Declaration was the crucial victory, no doubt, but he knew that building Zion was going to take decades – if the British did not give them everything all at once, it did not matter. The ordeal of wartime Turkish tyranny had gravely weakened Palestinian Zionism both numerically and financially, and money could not be obtained from Eastern European Jewry, racked by the devastation and pogroms that accompanied the Russian revolution and the establishment of an independent Poland. American Jews, deeply involved with the troubles of their kin in Europe, were unwilling to divert relief funds to what they thought of as little better than a national museum. Weizmann not only tried to maintain good relations with Britain but he turned diplomatically to the Arabs whom he saw as primarily concerned that Faisal be allowed to set up a kingdom in Syria. On Allenby's suggestion he made what was then an immensely difficult journey around Sinai to meet the Emir in Trans-Jordan. Ultimately, on 3 January 1919, the Hashemite signed an agreement to recognize the Zionists in Palestine, although the pact never explicitly mentioned a Jewish state. In return, Faisal expected Zionist support for his claim to Syria and their deal was conditional on his success in Damascus. In the end, the French drove him out of Syria and the treaty came to nothing, although the WZO never has stopped using the pact as one of its title-deeds to Palestine.

British Support

In those early years the Zionist position in Palestine was completely dependent on the British government's goodwill and Britain's benevolence towards Zionism was in inverse ratio to its hostility towards Jews as such. The British bourgeoisie had turned anti-Semitic in reaction to the Jewish migration from the Tsarist empire, its most representative figure in this regard being Balfour himself. The prime minister in 1905, he had made a notorious statement in support of curbing immigration. According to *Hansard*, he stated that

> he undoubtedly thought that a state of things could easily be imagined in which it would not be to the advantage of the civilization of the country that there should be an immense body of persons who, however patriotic, able and industrious, however much they threw themselves into the national life, still, by their own action, remained a people apart and not merely held a religion different from the vast majority of their fellow countrymen, but only intermarried among themselves.[1]

It was his government that had offered 'Uganda' to Herzl in the hope that the protectorate would divert some of the migration away from Britain. In 1914, after meeting Balfour for the second time, Weizmann wrote to a friend that the former prime minister 'told me that he once had a long talk with Cosima Wagner in Bayrouth and that he shared many of her anti-Semitic ideas.'[2] The Bolshevik revolution, which occurred within days of the Declaration, was seen by most of the ruling class as a Jewish plot. Although in Britain itself official anti-Semitism never passed beyond immigration restrictions and social discrimination, the British government had no qualms in financing and arming the White Guard pogrom hordes in Russia, thus bearing fundamental responsibility for their slaughter of at least 30,000 Jews. Zionism was seen as another tool against Bolshevism: in a 1920 article, 'Zionism versus Bolshevism', Churchill wrote that Trotsky hated Zionism because it thwarted 'his schemes of a world-wide communistic state under Jewish domination.'[3] For Churchill, Zionism helped thwart Trotsky, directing 'the energies and the hopes of the Jews in every land towards a simpler, a truer, and a far more attainable goal'.[4]

From a purely colonial point of view Zionism had an additional appeal: the British ruling class swore by the maxim 'divide et impera' and they always sought a local ally. They relied on the Muslims in India against the Hindu majority, the Turks in Cyprus against the Greeks, the Malays against the Chinese in Malaysia. Constantly before their eyes was the immediate example of Ireland. Sir Ronald Storrs, their first military governor of Jerusalem, later wrote that the Zionist enterprise was 'one that blessed him that gave as well as him that took, by forming for England "a little loyal Jewish Ulster" in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism'.[5]

Palestine After the War

The army in Palestine had a different picture of Zionists and Jews; their anti-Semitism was much cruder. The *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* had been introduced into the country by officers fresh from the anti-Bolshevik armies in the Caucasus. Many officials saw the Zionists not as the enemies of Communism, but as Communists. After all, they reasoned, were not most Zionists also from Russia? Very few of the military on the spot – and not just the anti-Semites – could accept the image of a 'Jewish Ulster'. There, the Protestants were a majority in four contiguous counties, a million strong, 23% of Ireland's 4.3 million people. There were only 56,000 Jews in Palestine in 1917, a paltry 8% of the population, and they constituted a majority in only two cities, Jerusalem and Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. And about half of the Jews were Chassidim who abhorred Zionism as the grossest heresy. The Northern Ireland Protestants could, with minimal British assistance, defend themselves – even without British assistance Irish nationalism would have found it difficult to gain a foothold in Ulster – but everyone understood that the tiny Zionist Yishuv would have been driven into the Mediterranean by the Palestinians and the millions of Arabs in the surrounding countries, but for the presence of the protecting British troops. The quantitative difference between the pro-imperialist populations of Ulster and Palestine was so substantial that the two situations were not comparable, certainly not then. From the beginning of the British occupation there was this contradiction between Westminster's vision of a Jewish Ulster – or a Jewish Gibraltar as Colonel Patterson, the commander of Jabotinsky's Legion once put it – and the practical reality, easily felt by the military satraps, that the Arabs were the real force in the land. The local administration knew that they had to do nothing for the Zionists, who could not do anything to harm them and were utterly dependent on them.

Weizmann's pact with Faisal was designed to find an additional prop for Zionism by making a deal with the feudal class of the larger Arab society of the Middle East at the expense of the local landlord class. The pact came to nothing as the French ran the pretender out of Damascus but, even if his kingdom had ever come into being, it is impossible to believe that the Palestinians would have considered themselves bound by his signature on a treaty signing away their country. Unlike Weizmann, Jabotinsky never held the notion that Zion could come about as a result of a peace agreement with any Arab. He readily recognized that only the British kept the natives from throwing the Zionists out of the country, but that became the point of departure of his determination to constantly keep the pressure on the British. He insisted that the moment the Arabs saw that the British had the slightest hesitation in implementing their promises to build the national home, they would start exerting the strongest counter-pressure in the hope of making London abandon the

Declaration. Therefore, he tirelessly argued, the Zionists had no choice but to unswervingly demand that the British back them to the hilt.

Nahum Goldmann once correctly pointed out that if the powers had decided, one hundred years earlier, to set up a Zionist state, the Arabs could have done nothing to stop them as they were, then, little more than tribesmen. And if, he maintained, the Balfour Declaration were not to have come about when it did, but were to be granted, say, in 2017, there would be absolutely no chance of its fulfilment because a united Arab nation could easily resist such an imposition. Post World War I Arab nationalism was far closer to its past than to its future. With the exception of three weak states on the Arabian peninsula, Hejaz, Nejd and Yemen, the entire Arab world was subject to Europe. Arab Palestine on its own was socially incapable of effectively resisting the combined onslaught of Britain and the Zionists. The vast bulk of the people were either illiterate peasants or bedouins. As there was virtually no industry in the country beyond the artisan level a modern working class did not exist. The Arab mercantile class, mostly Christians, was very weak. The dominant Muslim landlords, the effendis, were classic Levantines, a parasitic upper class who would never mobilize the peasants against the invaders for fear that once their tenants stood up to either the British or the Zionists they would turn on them. They saw in imperialism the perfect protector of their social position, they had fully accepted Turkish domination and, but for the abiding goad of the Balfour Declaration, they would have been only too happy to serve their new British masters.

There was no possibility of the Palestinian masses not trying to defeat the Balfour policy; their lack of education predetermined the form of resistance. Until the British gave the country to the Zionists there had never been any history of anti-Jewish outbreaks. Under the Turks much of the countryside was given over to banditry but it never was aimed at Jews as such. Jewish religious pilgrims had been settling in the country for centuries and had met with nothing worse than patronizing contempt. Everyone who encountered them, Arabs, Zionists, Christian travellers, the British, despised them. The ultimate in fanaticism, they came to pray at the Wailing Wall and to die on holy soil. Most were elderly, did not work and lived miserable lives on meagre charity from world Jewry. They never hesitated to beg from tourists right at the Wall. The Jewish quarter of the old city of Jerusalem was a caricature of the Jewish slums of Europe, decrepit and filthy. Palestine was an Islamic country and the Muslims considered them cowardly and found this their most offensive characteristic. But they were a people of the book, the Koran insists on their right to their religion, they harmed no one, and were left alone. There were some Sephardic families whose ancestors came centuries before, not so much as pilgrims but as refugees from Spain, these and some Ashkenazi Yiddish speakers who lived in Tiberias and some of the other small towns were more industrious and hence more respected. Sultanic Palestine was not a model of communal relations, but no one

thought of the Palestinians as anti-Jewish. This changed with the Balfour Declaration. Although some of the educated understood that not all the Jews were Zionists, the illiterate masses were incapable of such a subtle distinction. All they knew was that, for no sin of theirs, the new rulers were giving their country to the Jews.

Jabotinsky saw the Arabs were agitated and realized the potential danger. At first it did not disturb him too much – there were Legionnaires in the army and he had no doubt that the British would not permit the natives to get out of hand. But his discharge and the disintegration of the Legion, both from above and below, began to concern him. He knew from his London days that the British upper classes were streaked with anti-Semitism. But as long as their methods suited his purpose he assumed his characteristic air of Machiavellian indifference. Wickham Steed, editor of the *Times*, was intensely anti-Semitic but he had been a strong backer of the Legion. As late as 1928 Jabotinsky could write:

> He understood the mentality of Zionism as few Christians can understand it – the inner, spiritual, anti-assimilation aspect . . . Naturally – as with any non-Jew who 'talks like a Zionist' – many Jews accused him of anti-Semitism. This tendency among my fellow Jews – to see a Haman in every Gentile who permits himself to tell a 'Jewish' anecdote (and his anecdote is usually a sugary compliment compared to those we tell against ourselves) – has always been completely incomprehensible to me.[6]

But while Steed's anti-Semitism had no personal violence to it, in Palestine some of the military had been involved with the Whites in Russia, many others simply knew that Zionism had to generate a pogrom, and they would welcome it, believing it would shake off the British government's pro-Zionist policies. Then they could get on with the serious business of coming to terms with the effendis and the rich merchants. Jabotinsky was a Russian and he could sense the danger of a pogrom: now he, who had eagerly worked with both Russian and British anti-Semites, began to denounce the military as anti-Semites! In July 1919, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, the leader of the Zionist Organization of America, came out for a visit. Jabotinsky warned him that the army's complacency was going to assure a pogrom and that they would be happy to see it come. But Brandeis was incapable of believing evil of the British army; he dismissed Jabotinsky with a sneering 'Sir, I can only see that we do not speak a common language.'[7] Jabotinsky quickly wrote an article saying that, while they should not cry wolf, nevertheless Zionist headquarters had to insist that the British government make it quite clear that Zionism was in Palestine to stay and that no pogrom would be tolerated. Weizmann and Brandeis were too moderate to ever contemplate using strong words with the rulers of such a respectable body as the British Empire, and Jabotinsky soon realized that it was up to him to set up Zionism's own answer to what he knew had to come.

The Haganah

In December he convinced some other Palestinian Zionist leaders that they had to set up a Haganah or Defence. Such pro-imperialist paramilitary organizations are immediately confronted with the basic question of their relation to legality, and Jabotinsky insisted that they train openly even if some of them were arrested. Zionists had to have the right to defend themselves in the Jewish national home. His Haganah was designed to compel the imperialists to integrate their Jewish Orangemen directly into the military apparatus.

From the beginning, the army knew the Haganah existed. Jabotinsky had his men drill on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, the seat of the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration, and he asked Storrs to deputize his men as special constables. Storrs did nothing to either encourage or discourage him as far as building the militia, but in February, the British government did make it quite clear to the Arabs that it meant to back Zionism. On orders, the chief administrator officially read the Balfour Declaration to a delegation of Arab notables, provoking thousands into the streets.

The Nebi Musa Riot

Faisal's coronation in Damascus on 8 March brought out even more people, and the authorities banned further political rallies. But the pogrom erupted on 4 April, due to incompetent handling of the traditional Nebi Musa religious festival. Even Weizmann, who happened to be visiting Palestine, had finally become worried that the situation could get out of control, and he went to the British with his fears. General Louis Bols told him not to worry: 'There *can* be no trouble; the town is stiff with troops.'[8] Because that year Passover coincidentally fell on the same day as the Nebi Musa ceremony, Weizmann, for all of his concern, left Jerusalem to spend the holiday in Haifa. A situation developed in which a series of accidents led into each other and caused the tragic outcome of the day. Nebi Musa means the Tomb of Moses. Townspeople from outlying regions annually marched to Jerusalem to pray at the al-Aqsa mosque and would then leave the city to go down to Jericho to the traditional gravesite of Allah's prophet, Moses. A contingent from Hebron had approached Jerusalem, and had swung into the Jaffa Road when it was stopped by Jerusalem's Mayor, Musa Kazim al-Husayni, who addressed them from a balcony in favour of Faisal. Younger politicians started to harangue them from adjoining balconies. The police, wanting to make up for lost time, changed the route march. Usually the procession wound around the walls to the Damascus gate and then through the Muslim quarter to the mosque. This time they were diverted through the Jaffa Gate and the Hebronites went past the Jewish quarter. Stones started flying and soon stores were being looted and Jewish passers-by were attacked. The British preparations fell apart immediately. There were no British constables on duty in the old city and the general in charge

had already left for Jericho. Storrs was supposed to have been told of the arrival of the marchers but no one had remembered to tell him; in the end the British force on the spot consisted of an Arab police detachment in the charge of a young British lieutenant.

There were no Haganah men in the Jewish quarter: most of its inhabitants were bitterly opposed to Zionism, they wanted no patrols there as they did not want the Arabs to identify them with the hated Zionists. When the riot broke out, Jabotinsky rushed his forces from the new city, but by that time British troops had blocked the gates, allowing no one to enter or leave. Eventually the police and troops succeeded in pushing the Hebronites into the mosque, but the final toll was six Jews killed, 211 wounded and two women raped. Haganah retaliation left four Arab dead and 21 wounded.

Nebi Musa was a profound disaster to the Palestinian cause. The murder of unoffending Chassids gave the world an impression of blind hatred and fanaticism. The mayor was forced to resign, and the British government hastened its preparations for replacing the OETA with a civilian governor firmly committed to its pro-Zionist policies. But in the immediate instance the OETA's response was a textbook example of imperial bureaucratic procedure: they tried to arrest the Mayor's relative, the 25-year-old al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, who escaped; and Jabotinsky, who was allowed, as an ex-officer and a gentleman, to surrender himself into a more or less honourable political-prisoner status. Nineteen of his men were also arrested on weapons charges.

Jabotinsky's Trial and Sentence

Jabotinsky was brought before an officer and his Arab secretary, who asked, in Arabic, for his name. When he remained silent the secretary asked again, in French, before finally getting around to English. Jabotinsky countered by refusing even to answer in English: 'I shall not answer a court secretary who belongs to the tribe of the murders whose attacks upon innocent people, coupled with pillage and raping, are still going on.'[9] He was held in solitary so that he could not communicate with his men before being called as a witness at their trial. They were found guilty and sentenced to three years. His trial, also a special military field-court, was held only six days after his arrest; he was not given an attorney and the proceedings were in secret. The prosecution racked the Ottoman law books, which still applied, to find a suitable law to cover the case and could only come up with a charge of arming with the evil intent of bringing rapine and pillage. Jabotinsky had no difficulty in getting Storrs and other witnesses to admit that no one thought that the man who had come to them to plead that his men be deputized had any criminal intent. Nevertheless, he was summarily sentenced to 15 years, the same as two Arabs convicted of rape. Jabotinsky knew the case would ultimately be

thrown out and, as a start, orders came from London to treat him as a special political prisoner. Storrs went to Jabotinsky's home and brought him his clothes, and let Jabotinsky and his wife dine and drink wine in his specially furnished cell.

The Zionist prisoners and the two rapists were sent to Egypt to do their time, but the administrators there decided they did not want the complications of accepting Palestine's political prisoners and they were sent back to serve their sentences in Acre fortress. The place was a crusader pile, complete with moat and picturesque walls falling to the sea, and his supporters, Jewish and Gentile, visualized him as a romantic sufferer. The 20 Jews were never thought of as criminals; they wore their own clothes and were allowed catered kosher food, and Jabotinsky received a constant stream of visitors. Everything was very honourable, the guards would put down their rifles to join their wards at meals. Jabotinsky started translating Sherlock Holmes into Hebrew, then turned to Omar Khayyam. He finally settled down to doing *La Divina Commedia* on contract for a Jewish publishing house in America, but he got bogged down almost immediately. Dante isn't Conan Doyle, living Hebrew had stopped in the Middle Ages and modern translators had to constantly invent new words. Jabotinsky soon found that he had to first sit down and construct a rhyming dictionary before he even got going. All he was able to finish in his short incarceration were a few stanzas. (He returned frequently to the task though he was never to finish it. His Dante is seen as his major accomplishment as a translator.)

As is quite common in military court cases, the original sentences for Jabotinsky and his men were sharply reduced on review. Allenby took away 14 years, but naturally Jabotinsky wasn't satisfied and neither was the movement. Jewish opinion both in Palestine and abroad was shocked at his arrest and the original sentence. The initial response of the Yishuv was a general Jewish strike on 19 April and another a week later. British public opinion was equally nonplussed at the sentence and sharp parliamentary questions were raised from the beginning. Jabotinsky expected the movement to keep up the pressure but Weizmann was never one to forcefully take on the British government and the campaign dwindled to little more than resolutions from Zionist bodies. But when Sir Herbert Samuel, a Jewish Liberal who had helped Weizmann get the Declaration, was sent out as the first civilian High Commissioner, he granted an amnesty to everyone connected with the riots, including the fugitive al-Husayni and the two rapists, and the prisoners were released on 8 July. Jabotinsky's reaction was one of outrage at being put on the same level as the two common criminals, he sent Samuel a telegram: 'Don't make this mistake! Better leave me here in Acre, but don't put me on the same level with a blackie.'[10] (Later he claimed he meant the two Arabs were morally black but *Merriam Webster* gives only one definition of a blackie: 'a person belonging to a darkly pigmented race'. Certainly Samuel could have interpreted the term in no other way. When Jabotinsky

told of the telegram at the 1921 World Zionist Congress there was an outcry at the word.) He was not content with simply being included in the amnesty. A highly verbal figure, by then used to the niceties of upper-class British bureaucracy, he had to prove his point. He insisted the WZO pay his legal fees while he fought to have the whole case expunged. At first they politely refused as, sensibly enough, they could see no point in wasting good money on a sheet of legal foolscap, but internal political considerations finally compelled them to indulge him and a year later the War Office dismissed the original charge.

The Jewish Legion Proposal Revived

Although no one knew it at the time, Jabotinsky was then at what was to be the high point of his official Zionist career. 'Lieutenant Jabotinsky', as he was referred to in keeping with the post-war usage of citing a gentleman's war rank, had to be suitably rewarded and in March 1921 he was given a place on the World Zionist Executive. From the beginning he was the hardest of the hard-liners on the Executive. The British were considering a mixed Arab-Jewish militia to garrison the country along with British troops, and Jabotinsky got the Executive to successfully lobby against it. Few Jews would join such a force as the British never paid 'colonials' as much as it did Britons; *de facto*, it would rapidly become an Arab army. Instead he got the Executive to propose a Jewish Legion, with the WZO promising to make up the pay differential. The Executive was genuinely concerned about the British organizing Arab troops but it never really took its own Legion proposal seriously; if the British had been at all interested in it they would have kept the original Legion. The real question facing the movement was recognizing the fact that the Legion was never to be, and that if they were going to be able to count on themselves for defence they had to build the Haganah as a clandestine organization. The question became pressing with the May 1921 pogrom in Jaffa. A fight between Jewish Communists and Labour Zionists at a Tel Aviv May Day rally had been broken up by the British; the gunshots were misunderstood by the Arabs in neighbouring Jaffa as the start of a Zionist attack on them and they started killing Jews. Before the riots ended 40 Jews were killed and menacing crowds had gathered in many other Arab cities as well. This time the sheer ferocity of the outbreak worked to Arab advantage. The British began to realize that backing the Zionists could only act to provoke the Arab masses and they temporarily banned further Jewish immigration as a gesture of concern for Arab susceptibilities. Eventually immigration was renewed but the Zionists understood that the Arabs had to fear retaliation in the event of another attack. If the pogroms continued it would only be a matter of time before the British government concluded that Zionism was too much of a burden and they would be abandoned.

Jabotinsky originally refused to have anything to do with an illegally oriented Haganah, insisting on the need to press for the Legion as a

permanent component of the garrison. Were not the Zionists in Palestine by right, was not a Jewish national home official British policy? He asked the question: was Britain serious in patronizing Zionism? If so, a Legion followed automatically. The Arabs would always interpret its absence as meaning that the British were still unsure of their aims and they would never stop pressing the British government until they got their way. He was, as Schechtman conceded, more than a little fanatic in holding for a legal unit, slow to realize that it was grimly necessary to build a here-and-now Haganah while politically still calling for the Legion. The controversy discredited him among the local Zionist leadership who came to agree with Weizmann that he was totally unrealistic as to what could be got out of the British given the parallelogram of forces.

Retraction of British Support for a Jewish State

In November 1921 the Executive sent him to the United States for what turned out to be a seven-month tour for the Jewish national fund. In his absence the British decided that the Jaffa riots were a warning that they were courting disaster if they attempted to turn Palestine into an eventual Jewish state. On 3 June 1922, Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, sent the Zionist Executive a draft of a White Paper that clearly announced that it had never been the intention of the government to establish a Jewish state. Churchill drew attention to the literal wording of the Declaration which, he claimed, did not 'contemplate that Palestine as a whole should be converted into a Jewish National Home, but that such a Home should be founded *in Palestine*'.[11] Worse yet, Trans-Jordan was summarily removed from the 'national home'. The White Paper was an immense setback for, although the Declaration had not mentioned a Jewish majority or state, there was no doubt that Balfour had given the Zionists a chance to become the majority within the country and that, then, as Lloyd George later wrote in his memoirs, 'Palestine would thus become a Jewish commonwealth'.[12]

Jabotinsky arrived back in London on 17 June. Churchill demanded the Executive's reply for the next morning – if they failed to comply, there would be worse to come. Jabotinsky knew that Weizmann had not forcefully lobbied against the Colonial Secretary. He tried to get them to give a qualified assent. When they passively agreed to Churchill's terms he refused to sign their final document. But he deliberately did not resign in protest; quitting them in the hour of defeat smacked too much of disloyalty for him.

Jabotinsky and the WZO

After the White Paper it was clear that Jabotinsky had matured into a total opponent of the WZO's leaders. He was all aggression; they were modest, acquiescent, bourgeois and bureaucratic. Almost alone on the Executive in his ideas, he could do nothing against people such as these and being on the Executive in those circumstances was pointless, ulti-

mately he could only resign and organize an opposition faction. The inevitable finally happened the next year, at the January 1923 Actions Committee meeting in Berlin. He presented the Committee with three resolutions:

1) The government was to be summarily informed that tepid support was not enough, that uncertainty over the extent of British backing was causing investors and donors to hold back, thus bringing the Yishuv to ultimate bankruptcy.

2) All anti-Semites and anti-Zionists were to be removed from the Mandatory administration.

3) The WZO was publicly declare that it stood by its historic aims.

The other Executive members put it to him very simply: why did he not simply resign instead of wasting both his and their time trying to convince them? The Executive was Zionism's cabinet, not its parliament. Their point was well taken, but not to Jabotinsky's way of thinking. He saw himself as the point runner of Zionism, indispensable to the cause. He had done nothing to break discipline, they could not force him out and, as of 17 January, he refused to quit. Then, without warning, when the Actions Committee convened again on the morning of the 18th, a messenger handed their president his letter of resignation. He wrote later that his decision was taken after discussion with friends, but Schechtman, certainly no enemy, is convinced that he took the step strictly by himself. He did talk, or rather listen, to friends tell him *not* to quit. The point is important because that day, the 18th, he was supposed to face a special inquiry on his relations with the Ukrainian pogromist Simon Petliura (see Chapter 6). Jabotinsky was never again to hold an official position in the hierarchy of Zion.

The Situation in Retrospect

In 1923, Jabotinsky's name was virtually unheard of – even most Jews would have hardly recognized it. But within the Zionist world he was probably better known than anyone except Weizmann. His role in the 1920 pogrom and his subsequent incarceration had made him a hero even to many outside the movement. In retrospect, we see that it was to be his finest hour. But even here, realistically, what can be said about both the pogrom and Jabotinsky except that it was a racist pogrom countered by a racist and a militarist? His best and his worst sides came forth. He was always brave. Certainly he was railroaded to prison; anyone utilizing such circumstances to translate Dante is hardly an intellectual fly-weight. But refusing to speak to the court secretary because he was an Arab was racism, and calling anyone a 'blackie', even a rapist or a pogrom instigator, is the same as calling him a nigger. Jabotinsky was an avowed believer in racial separation and the general cultural inferiority of the Arabs. At the very best he can only be seen as a brave ultra-rightist, nothing more. That Arab resistance to Zionism took the form of a pogrom should not blind people today, with their awareness of the hyper-intensity of nationalism,

generated both by Nazism and then the post-war epoch of national independence wars, to the inevitability of a struggle against both Britain and the Zionists. Centuries of Turkish rule produced a poverty stricken province with a corrupt effendi layer and ignorance and fanaticism below it. This was the basis of Zionism's ability to take root in the land. Rioting was always followed by long periods of mass exhaustion. The low level of Palestinian culture was, however, only a precondition for success. The presence of the British was indispensable. The Zionists point out that the British did not protect them in 1920–1. True enough, except that ultimately the British army did disperse the mobs. Without the British army, a Haganah based on the tiny Zionist Yishuv would have been driven into the sea even by such as the then Palestinian elite. Britain, of course, had no more right to be in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv than it had to be in Dublin and Belfast or Delhi and Karachi. It is only in the West, with its colonialist history, that Zionists still dare to come forth with such as the Balfour Declaration, the Faisal–Weizmann agreement and other legalisms from the age of empire and potentates as their title-deeds to another people's country. To the great mass of humanity who suffered under the imperialist yoke, especially that of the British Empire, such citations only serve to demonstrate the reactionary nature of Zionism.

Notes

1. *Hansard*, 1905.
2. Leonard Stein (ed.), Weizmann, *Letters*, vol. VII, p. 81.
3. Winston Churchill, 'Zionism versus Bolshevism', *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, 8 February 1920, p. 5.
4. Ibid.
5. Ronald Storrs, *Orientations*, p. 405.
6. Jabotinsky, *Story of the Jewish Legion*, p. 80.
7. Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman*, p. 321.
8. Weizmann, *Trial and Error*, p. 254.
9. Schechtman, p. 331.
10. Ibid., p. 362.
11. Laqueur, *The Israeli–Arab Reader*, p. 46.
12. Weizmann, p. 212.

6. Pact with the Devil – Simon Petliura

Resignation from the WZO

If it was Jabotinsky who stalked Weizmann and the Executive majority at the January 1923 Actions Committee, he did not lack critics of his own policies, particularly his relations with the Ukrainian pogromist, Simon Petliura. The Po'ale Zionists refused to even discuss his resolutions until they got an explanation for his arrangements with the Ukrainians, and the meeting was only allowed to proceed when Jabotinsky agreed to come before a special commission the next morning. When the commission met on 18 January 1923, it was greeted with a letter declaring that he had resigned, not only from the Executive but from the WZO. This being so, he saw no purpose in coming before them. The Labour Zionists were naturally indignant and announced that he 'shirked the ordeal of appearing before the Commission'.[1] Should he return, they promised that they would again demand an explanation for his actions. He did return to the WZO, as an ordinary member, though the leftists never raised the matter again for formal organizational adjudication, but the Petliura affair was to pursue him throughout the rest of his life. He always insisted that his resignation had nothing to do with the scheduled hearing, and that he was proud of his dealings with the Ukrainians, but it is difficult to believe that the knowledge that he stood in danger of being declared a collaborator with a murderous anti-Semite, at least by the Labour Zionists on the commission, had nothing to do with the timing of his resignation or the fact that he quit not merely the Executive, but the movement to which he had devoted almost 20 years of his energies.

Meeting with Slavinsky

On 30 August 1921 Maxim Antonovitch Slavinsky, the chief of the Extraordinary Diplomatic Mission of the Ukrainian Democratic Republic in Czechoslovakia, came to visit Jabotinsky in Prague where he had come for the 12th World Zionist Congress. The government Slavinsky claimed to represent no longer existed, having been run out of Kiev by the Bolsheviks, but its leader, Simon Petliura, had taken refuge in eastern Galicia, an ethnically Ukrainian territory occupied by Poland, where he

still had 15,000 men under arms and the financial patronage of the French.

The Ukraine had become one of the central cockpits of the vast struggle for power in the former Tsarist empire. Once the Germans had been defeated, the prime contenders there had reduced themselves to the Bolsheviks, the strongest force among the working class; the Anarchists whose stronghold was the peasantry in the eastern Ukraine; the White Guards or Tsarists, backed by the British and French fleets in the Black Sea; the Poles under Marshall Pilsudski, with his visions of the restoration of the medieval Polish empire running from the Baltic to the Black Sea; and the Ukrainian nationalists of the Rada or council. An estimated 60,000 Jews were murdered in the Ukraine between the years 1917 and 1920. About half were slaughtered by Petliura's armies in at least 897 separate pogroms. It was the ferocity of the pogroms, those of Petliura and the Tsarists, who killed approximately 28,000 Jews, and the right-wing Poles, who butchered most of the rest, which had driven the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian Jewry into the arms of the Bolsheviks. In 1921 the bulk of world Jewry was not Communist, but the consensus was that, for the Ukraine and Russia, the alternatives for the Jews were massacre or Bolshevism. There is not the slightest doubt that even the richest of Jews abroad would have seen Slavinsky as a fiendish enemy of the entire Jewish people. But not Jabotinsky, who welcomed him as an old friend and as a liberal and a sincere friend of the Jews, with whom he had collaborated in the 1907 Duma elections.[2] Now, 'as good old friends', for so Slavinsky described their conversation in a report to Petliura, they set about to improve Jewish opinion concerning Ukrainian nationalism.[3]

Slavinsky told the Zionist that the Rada planned an invasion of Soviet Ukraine for the spring of 1922. Any success would raise the possibility of further pogroms; what could be done to prevent them? They had issued proclamations condemning the massacres, should they issue another? 'No more proclamations. I or no one else will believe them. There must be some actions, not words.'[4] What Jabotinsky proposed was that the Ukrainian army be accompanied by an armed Jewish police force. These gendarmes would not fight the Red Army but would serve to protect the Jews of any area captured by the very army that would bring them into the country. Slavinsky went to his headquarters to see if Petliura would agree and Jabotinsky consulted with 11 Ukrainian and Russian Zionists in Prague for the Congress. Eight approved the concept, but it is to be noted that Jabotinsky failed to reveal the negotiations to a single leader of the WZO, in spite of the fact that a letter from Slavinsky condemning the pogroms had been read out at the opening session of the Congress. On 4 September, Jabotinsky, acting strictly in an individual capacity without the knowledge of the WZO, signed the Slavinsky–Jabotinsky Agreement. Each pledged 'within the sphere of his personal influence', to implement their planned Jewish police force.[5]

In October, a Nationalist border raid failed so disastrously that the

planned spring invasion had to be called off, but the existence of the pact was leaked to the public by the Ukrainians. Their problems were primarily political and, in no little way, connected to the Jewish problem. They were already seen as a defeated force and their previous reign in Kiev had given them a deserved reputation as savages. As long as that image held they found it impossible to convince either the French or the Poles that they were a credible contender for power. Now here was one of the most famous figures in Zionism prepared to help them; how could anyone say that they were still pogromists?

The answer is, of course, that everyone still believed them to be pogromists. News of the pact did nothing to help the Ukrainians, the French soon cut off the subsidies for their army and the Rada disappeared from history, but the revelation of the treaty nearly destroyed Jabotinsky. He had gone off to America on tour for the Jewish National Fund when the storm broke. *Emes* (Truth), the organ of the *Yevsektsiia*, the Yiddish language section of the Soviet Communist Party, gave the report of the Agreement huge headlines: 'The Zionists Are Plunging A Knife Into The Revolution's Back. Jabotinsky Has Aligned Himself With Petliura To Wage War Against The Red Army.' The cry went up to finally liquidate the remnants of organized Zionism in the Soviet Union. In overwhelming proportions, the Zionist and the general Jewish press, to say nothing of the organs of the Jewish left, condemned the treaty. Many Jews thought of Jabotinsky merely as a fool: what was the point of even bothering with an obviously spent force as the Rada? Others – and not only on the left – saw him as indeed motivated by anti-Soviet animus. On 14 November 1921, the Executive cabled him in New York demanding a full explanation. In December, the Actions Committee formally declined 'all responsibility on behalf of the Zionist Organization' and resolved that he be asked to justify his pact on his return from America. Calls for his resignation were heard all over Europe.

Jabotinsky's Explanation

Jabotinsky reacted coldly to the fury he aroused. He elaborated his thinking on the general questions involved in a series of articles:

> Wherever there is danger of Jewish pogroms, because of a conflict between two or more non-Jewish armed camps, I recommend an agreement to form a Jewish gendarmerie with the White Army, a Jewish gendarmerie with the Red Army, a Jewish gendarmerie with the lilac and pea-green army, if any; let them settle their quarrels, we shall police the towns and see to it that the Jewish population should not be molested.[6]

There was both an unreal and dishonest quality to his posture. That Jews could adopt such a damsel-in-the-tower posture towards contending forces in a civil war, when one side slaughtered Jews while the other side's army was led by a Jew, is unthinkable. Throughout history, Jews, some-

times as individuals, often as a community, had immersed themselves in the civil strife of the societies they lived in. His position is dishonest in that there is not the slightest evidence that he ever proposed, or thought of proposing, 'a Jewish gendarmerie with the Red Army', that was just rhetoric. We shall see below that he never proposed any kind of defensive military alliance with any left wing force, Jewish or otherwise, against either the Nazi stormtroopers or any other anti-Semitic element. On the contrary, he repeatedly sought and received the patronage of anti-Semitic regimes both before and after the Slavinsky incident.

Jabotinsky's initial position was that his pact was no concern of the WZO Executive. The WZO as such took no positions in *Landspolitik*, his action could only be examined by the Zionists of Russia and the Ukraine and these were already banned in theory and nearly so in practice. This left only the Conference of Russian–Ukrainian Zionists, an exile group, as qualified, in his mind, to sit in judgement on his action. On 7–11 September that body voted that his proposal was a neutral proposition and in no way an interference in Ukrainian politics, but even the exiles did not dare endorse Jabotinsky's scheme as such. Schechtman, who was one of the authors of the conference's resolution, insists that they expressed no approval: 'the Conference did not go into the question of the *merits* of the Agreement'.[7] Their attitude was emphatically different from that of most Jews but it was quite predictable. Soviet Jewish youth, understanding that the Red Army was all that stood between them and the pogromists, had flocked into the military. These included many far removed from the Communist Party ideologically. The Conferees, on the other hand, represented those hostile to the new regime. Their reasons doubtlessly varied; some lost their property as a result of the Revolution; others were incensed by the ban on Zionism but, whatever their reasoning, they were atypical of Soviet Jewry. To an ordinary Soviet Jew anyone who proposed that Jews volunteer to accompany a pogrom army that would, at the very least, try to kill Jews in their capacity as Red Army soldiers, was, *prima facie*, a traitor and a madman. Countless other Jews outside the USSR, including many Zionists, shared that gut reaction.

There is no doubt that the WZO leaders would never have approved of a pact with Petliura if Jabotinsky had asked them in advance. Nor did they give it their retrospective assent. But they certainly did not want to condemn him on the question. He had acted in his own name, not theirs; they had a clear policy of staying out of the internal politics of any nation; Zionism was proscribed in the Soviet Union; and they were the clients of the British, who had been the ally of the Tsar and then the paymasters for the post-war White Guard pogrom armies. Weizmann and the others knew all this and had done nothing to protest against the British government's criminal behaviour. The Executive recommended that the Actions Committee accept the finding of the Russian–Ukrainian Conference, but the Po'ale Zionists threatened to abstain from voting on the other political questions unless they got an explanation from Jabotinsky concerning

the whole event. Jabotinsky, determined to pursue Weizmann and his friends on the question of their pusillanimous approach toward the British in Palestine, announced himself willing to face a special commission on the subject. His summary resignation and refusal to appear before the commission therefore automatically enraged the leftists and, in fact, gave everyone the feeling that he was evading the hearing. The leadership, seeing him as little better than a useless maximalist with regard to Palestine, and embarrassed by the whole Petliura affair, had come to see him as a thorn in their flesh and, with all due regard to his undeniable talents and past services, were glad to see him out of the movement.

Jabotinsky soon returned to the WZO but never again as part of the leadership. He always maintained that his resignation had nothing to do with the commission. And, in fact, most of the panel were not connected with the Po'ale Zion and were unlikely to have got into a fight with him over the matter. He had already taken up far too much of their time with his constant quarrelling over Palestine. As they had already insisted that they were not Zionism's parliament but rather a business-like cabinet, they could hardly want to corner him on the question. When he showed up again as a delegate to the 1925 World Zionist Congress no one revived the issue. But as he began to rise up as an opponent of both the bourgeois grouping around Weizmann and the Labour Zionists the Petliura affair became a fixture in their characterization of him as an arch-reactionary.

Later Thoughts

Jabotinsky always defended the pact; in January 1935 Robert Gessner, a Jewish Communist journalist from Poland, encountered him on a liner crossing the Atlantic to America and Jabotinsky gave him a celebrated interview, telling him that he:

> would be as proud today as I was then to sign such an agreement . . . I don't believe Petliura himself was anti-Semitic. He came from a healthy peasant stock. It was his soldiers that got out of control.[8]

In the real world this was, as Jabotinsky himself conceded, a distinction without a difference. On 26 May 1926, a Jew, Shalom Schwartzbard, assassinated Petliura in Paris. The next year, during the trial (the jury refused to convict), Jabotinsky wrote that, whatever Petliura's feelings, he was responsible for the pogroms in that he failed to punish the pogromists and he did not resign. But he insisted that he remained a friend of the Ukrainian national movement 'notwithstanding the grave sin this movement has committed against the Jewish people'.[9] By the end of his life he had talked himself into believing that the treaty was the high point of his career, claiming that he was 'even more proud' of the Agreement than he was of his role in the creation of the Legion or the first Haganah: 'when I die you can write this as my epitaph – "This was the man who made the pact with Petliura".'[10]

In the end it scarcely matters if Jabotinsky resigned from the Executive because of his differences with the Weizmannites over Palestine or out of concern for the hearing before the commission. On both Palestine and the Ukraine he had clearly become unrealistic, taking positions that could not be implemented in the real world. For all his protestations, the WZO was powerless to compel Britain to change its course, and his Jewish gendarmerie for the Ukraine was nothing more than a fantasy. Jabotinsky was often a political *halluciné*, operating in his own world where thoughts were omnipotent. At times, as when the British and the Tsarists decided to use the Zionist obsession for their own purpose, as with the Legion, he had a measure of success, but this triumph masked his essential madness. Collusion with the Tsar's Foreign Ministry was just as criminal as signing the pact with Slavinsky but one made him a hero to his movement in that it helped obtain a Legion; the other escapade, no different in principle – both efforts were treasonable to the Jews – revealed the fundamentally bankrupt basis of his *Ur-politik*. The notion of Jewish youth trooping into the Ukraine behind a pogrom army shall forever be seen as one of his most outrageous notions.

Notes

1. Schechtman, 'The Jabotinsky–Slavinsky Agreement', *Jewish Social Studies*, October 1955, p. 301.
2. Ibid., p. 290.
3. Ibid.
4. Robert Gessner, 'Brown Shirts in Zion', *New Masses*, 19 February 1935, p. 13.
5. Schechtman, op. cit., p. 292.
6. Ibid., p. 297.
7. Ibid., p. 299.
8. Gessner.
9. Schechtman, p. 305.
10. Ibid., p. 306.

7. Founding Principles of Zionist Revisionism

After the Resignation: Revisionism

Jabotinsky's first impulse, upon resigning from the WZO, was to retire from active politics and to confine himself to journalistic commentary on the sad state of the Zionist movement. He was an isolated figure; even his closest supporters, fellow Russian exiles, completely disagreed with his abandoning the WZO. But, in spite of this not unimportant difference, by July 1923 the Russians announced that Jabotinsky had been appointed to the editorial board of their organ, the magazine *Rasswyet* (Dawn). A Russian language journal in Western Europe, dealing solely with Jewish and Zionist questions, and these from an extreme viewpoint, could never possibly pay for itself, and in autumn 1923 he had to turn to the new *Randstaaten* (as he called them), Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, looking for funds. It was the *Hasmonaea* (Maccabees), the student Zionists in Riga, who pushed him back into party life: 'And what now?' they asked. 'You have no right to preach such views and to stir up young people if you don't intend to call them to action. You either keep quiet, or organize a party.' That night he promised to do just that.

In December 1923, the first office of the new movement was set up in Berlin, and by spring 1924 their programme was sent out under the letterhead of the tentatively-named League for the Revision of Zionist Policies, Provisional Organization. By December the name had stuck, and by 25 April 1925 they were able to have the public 'Foundation Conference' of the League of Zionist Revisionists in Paris. Aside from the initial nucleus of *émigrés*, the new tendency had little success in recruiting veteran Zionists. Its first growth came within the ranks of the Jewish students in the Central European universities. Despite some wild talk about the Zionist masses rushing into their arms, the organization advanced very slowly. They had only four delegates to the 14th World Zionist Congress in 1925 (out of approximately 400) and ten in 1927. The twenties were primarily the period when Revisionism, meaning Jabotinsky, laid down its theoretical assumptions as to the nature of Zionism, and its attitude towards the Arabs and the British.

Although Herzl consciously thought of himself as the Jewish Cecil Rhodes, most early members of the WZO were not motivated by imperialist ideology. They either saw Zionism as an extension of the Jewish religion or, alternatively, as a modern substitute for the antiquated synagogue. Few early Zionists envisioned themselves in Palestine. In the West, Zionism scarcely ever elevated itself above the level of a charity. It was, as the wags had it, 'one Jew asking a second Jew for money to send a third Jew to Palestine'. The average Zionist never thought twice about the presence of Arabs in Palestine. To the members of the WZO, Zionism was for the Jews but it was not anti-Arab. The link with British imperialism basically did nothing to change the WZO's self-image. After all, Britain as Palestine's overlord was, to their thinking, a considerable improvement over Turkey. Britain meant law and order and, better still, modern education. While Britain shouldered the white man's burden, the Zionists saw themselves as doing their part for their 'Semitic cousins' in 'making the desert bloom'. Surely, they reasoned, the Arabs would come to see that Zionism was going to be a boon to Palestine.

– This section is key –

The Iron Wall

Jabotinsky never harboured such illusions, and once he was out of the Executive he felt free to develop his conceptions of the realities of Zionism. On 4 November 1923, *Rasswyet* ran an article, 'The Iron Wall (we and the Arabs)', considered, by friend and foe alike, to be his political classic. Perhaps because it is so blunt in its colonialist assumptions, his followers have not thought to make it readily available to the English-speaking public, though naturally it is well known in Israel. It is necessary to quote from it at length, but this is more than justified by its intrinsic importance.

He started out by insisting that he was not anti-Arab:

> The author of these lines is considered to be an enemy of the Arabs, a proponent of their expulsion, etc. This is not true. My emotional relationship to the Arabs is the same as it is to all other peoples – polite indifference. My political relationship is characterized by two principles. First: the expulsion of the Arabs from Palestine is absolutely impossible in any form. There will always be *two* peoples in Palestine. Second: I am proud to have been a member of that group which formulated the Helsingfors Program. We formulated it, not only for Jews, but for all peoples, and its basis is the equality of all nations. I am prepared to swear, for us and for our descendants, that we will never destroy this equality and we will never attempt to expel or oppress the Arabs. Our credo, as the reader can see, is completely peaceful. But it is absolutely another matter if it will be possible to achieve our peaceful aims through peaceful means. This depends, not on our relationship with the Arabs, but exclusively on the Arabs' relationship to Zionism.

He went on to ridicule those who thought that all that had to be done was to convince the Palestinians of the material advantages that would come their way as a result of Zionism:

> Any native people – it's all the same whether they are civilized or savage – views their country as their national home, of which they will always be the complete masters. They will not voluntarily allow, not only a new master, but even a new partner. And so it is for the Arabs. Compromisers in our midst attempt to convince us that the Arabs are some kind of fools who can be tricked by a softened formulation of our goals, or a tribe of money grubbers who will abandon their birth right to Palestine for cultural and economic gains. I flatly reject this assessment of the Palestinian Arabs. Culturally they are 500 years behind us, spiritually they do not have our endurance or our strength of will, but this exhausts all of the internal differences . . . They look upon Palestine with the same instinctive love and true fervour that any Aztec looked upon his Mexico or any Sioux looked upon his prairie . . . This childish fantasy of our 'Arabo-philes' comes from some kind of contempt for the Arab people, of some kind of unfounded view of this race as a rabble ready to be bribed in order to sell out their homeland for a railroad network.

It did not matter what words they used:

> Colonization itself has its own explanation, integral and inescapable, and understood by every Jew and Arab with his wits about him. Colonization can have only one goal. For the Palestinian Arabs this goal is inadmissible. This is in the nature of things. To change that nature is impossible.

Some Zionists naively looked to Faisal, whom the British had installed as their puppet in Baghdad, to make another deal with them. He would then, they calculated, use Arab bayonets to impose Zionism on the local population:

> If it were possible (and I doubt this) to discuss Palestine with the Arabs of Baghdad and Mecca as if it were only some kind of small, immaterial borderland, then Palestine would still remain for the Palestinians not a borderland, but their birthplace, the center and basis of their own national existence. Therefore it would be necessary to carry on colonization against the will of the Palestinian Arabs, which is the same condition that exists now.

What then? Those who held that an agreement with the natives was an essential condition for Zionism 'can now say "no" and depart from Zionism'. He drew the full implications of their position:

> Zionist colonization, even the most restricted, must either be terminated or carried out in defiance of the will of the native population. This colonization

> can, therefore, continue and develop only under the protection of a force independent of the local population – an iron wall which the native population cannot break through. This is, *in toto*, our policy towards the Arabs. To formulate it any other way would only be hypocrisy.

He emphasized that all Zionists believed in an iron wall:

> In this sense, there are no meaningful differences between our 'militarists' and our 'vegetarians'. One prefers an iron wall of Jewish bayonets, the other proposes an iron wall of British bayonets, the third proposes an agreement with Baghdad, and appears to be satisfied with Baghdad's bayonets – a strange and somewhat risky taste – but we all applaud, day and night, the iron wall.

If the wall of bayonets – Jewish bayonets were naturally *his* preference – grew strong enough, eventually the Palestinians would come to terms:

> All this does not mean that any kind of agreement is impossible, only a voluntary agreement is impossible. As long as there is a spark of hope that they can get rid of us, they will not sell these hopes, not for any kind of sweet words or tasty morsels, because they are not a rabble but a nation, perhaps somewhat tattered, but still living. A living people makes such enormous concessions on such fateful questions only when there is no hope left. Only when not a single breach is visible in the iron wall, only then do extreme groups lose their sway, and influence transfers to moderate groups. Only then would these moderate groups come to us with proposals for mutual concessions . . . on practical questions like a guarantee against expulsion, or equality and national autonomy . . . But the only path to such an agreement is the iron wall, that is to say the strengthening in Palestine of a government without any kind of Arab influence, that is to say one against which the Arabs will fight. In other words, for us the only path to an agreement in the future is an absolute refusal of any attempts at an agreement now.[1]

Jabotinsky recognized that the tiny Zionist settlement could never hold its own against the numerically superior Arabs without the presence of the British. And he knew, from first-hand experience, that with rare exceptions the politicians in London were not concerned with the genuine interests of the Jews of the world, all they cared about was their own interests. His writings aimed at a British audience were thus always couched in the most blatant pro-imperialist terms. As far back as 1917, in his *Turkey and the War*, he had already demonstrated his eagerness to lay down the law to any mutinous Arabs, who had to understand that the

> unshakable resolve to keep the whole Mediterranean in European hands forms the firm ground on which any Arab claim must be discussed lest the

> discussion be useless and fruitless . . .
>
> 'Piedmont' is a political term which hardly needs explanation. We have only to add that the sympathy one generally pays to the role of Piedmont in the Italian Risorgimento does not necessarily imply that the world ought to hail the idea of an Arab Piedmont with the same enthusiasm. The Italian revival held beautiful promises which we miss, so far, in the case of Pan-Arabia . . . it would only – and certainly – succeed in forming a permanent nest of agitation, intrigue and trouble . . . These considerations force us to think that the Arab claims can only have some chance of success at this moment if they are formulated with the utmost moderation. The independence of Syria, for instance, is clearly and hopelessly out of the question . . . it would . . . be understood by France, Italy and Britain alike as a most fateful attempt against the security of their colonial empires.[2]

While on the Executive, Jabotinsky slightly muted his anti-Arab feelings, his colleagues were still seeking the will-o'-the-wisp Arab monarch who would usher them into the seat of power. But once on his own he could give free vent to his total antagonism to Arab aspirations:

> In England and also among the civilized nations of the Mediterranean basin, the consciousness is growing that Europe has not fulfilled her task on the southern and eastern coasts of the Mediterranean, that the European peoples must make a decisive end to all efforts to dislodge them from the coast. A people which declares itself our enemy and seeks our ruin finds itself in open and concealed enmity to Europe, that is, to a hitherto unconquerable foe . . . We can never support the Arab movement which is at present opposed to us, and we are heartily pleased at every mishap to this movement, not only in neighbouring Transjordan and Syria but also in Morocco.[3]

From the beginning, the new faction never stopped stressing that Zion could be a mighty bastion of empire. Their ambition was described by Col. Henry Patterson, the former CO of the Legion, and from thence forward a Gentile mouthpiece for Revisionism, in an introduction to a second edition of Jabotinsky's *Story of the Jewish Legion*, (originally published in 1928). To the Irish Protestant, as devoted to King George as he was to the King James Bible, his former lieutenant was another Judah Maccabee, the reviver of the martial glories of the Jews of old. Not only would Britain be carrying out the revealed word of the Lord in restoring the Jews to their ancient seat, but Jewish nationalism would also have distinctly earthly compensations as well: 'A Jewish Palestine would have provided England with another Gibraltar – faithful to her unto death – at the eastern end of the Mediterranean.'[4]

In 1928, yet another Colonel, Josiah Wedgewood, a Labour MP, put out a book, *The Seventh Dominion*, calling for Palestine to become a Jewish Dominion. The Gentile Zionist's proposition was eagerly seized

upon by the Revisionists and Jabotinsky became the chairman of the Jerusalem branch of the League for the Seventh Dominion. That these imperialists should have such benign thoughts towards their charges in the Holy Land is mildly amusing; there was always an element in Britain that thought the spread of the Empire was divinely ordained, and with the Balfour Declaration this peculiar breed came into its own. The Pattersons and Wedgewoods were playing at being latter-day Cyruses. But for Jews, as with Jabotinsky and his friends, only just out of Tsarist Russia, to turn themselves into soldiers for the British Empire was simply ludicrous. Abba Achimeir, in 1930 the outstanding figure of Palestinian Revisionism, wrote that:

> In every East-West conflict, we will always be on the side of the West, for the West has represented a more superior culture than the East over the last thousand years, after the destruction of the Baghdad Caliphate by the Mongols . . . and we today are the most prominent and loyal bearers of the culture . . . our interest lies in expanding the British Empire even further than intended by the British themselves.[5]

Predictably, Jabotinsky's penchant for carrying things to extremes expressed itself even in his desire to convert himself into a tool of the British Empire. One would have thought he was addressing the Anti-Socialist and Anti-Communist Union in a London club rather than speaking in Yiddish in Warsaw on 28 December 1931, when he started bemoaning the decline of the Empire:

> England is no longer inspired by her old lust for building and leading. And what we ask of the English is, indeed, this lust and resolution, the capacity for more courageous, more creative action . . . England is becoming continental! Not long ago the prestige of the English ruler of the 'colored' colonies stood very high. Hindus, Arabs, Malays were conscious of his superiority and obeyed, not unprotestingly, yet completely. The whole scheme of training of the future rulers was built on the principle 'carry yourself so that the inferior will feel your unobtainable superiority in every motion'. But a decline of imperialist instinct is felt in Englishmen . . . This lessening of the taste for imperialist scope is revealed in various ways – in the indifference with which the emancipation of Egypt was received, in the lack of concern at the prospect of the loss of India and Ireland. This does not mean that all is lost. In five or ten years all this may change. England may still reeducate her proconsuls. The imperial appetite may flame up anew, because this is a very powerful and gifted people.[6]

But why should Britain, whose Empire girded the globe, require the services of the tiny Zionist colony in Palestine? Plainly, everyone could see that it was the Zionists who were in need of protection, and not the

other way around. But Jabotinsky had a ready answer: today was today; tomorrow would bring Britain new problems:

> I needn't dwell on the well-known truism of Palestine's importance from the viewpoint of British imperial interests; I have only to add that its validity absolutely depends on one paramount condition: namely that Palestine should cease being an Arab country . . . Should Palestine remain Arab, Palestine will follow the orbit of Arab destinies – secession, Federation of Arab countries, and elimination of all traces of European influence. But a Palestine predominantly Jewish, surrounded on all sides by Arab countries, will in the interests of its own preservation always tend to lean upon some powerful Empire, non-Arab and non-Mahommedan. This is an almost providential basis for a permanent alliance between England and a Jewish (but only a Jewish) Palestine.[7]

Given his grasp of the fact that a Zionist state could never be peacefully attained, and that as long as it was militarily weak, Zionism was always going to be seen by the British as a burden, it was logical that Jabotinsky should tell a January 1927 Berlin audience that 'the letter "L" (for legion) is the most important character in the Zionist alphabet; anti-Legionism is an abnegation of Zionism'.[8] Again and again he went back to his fundamental theme, proclaiming the

> iron law of every colonizing movement, a law which knows of no exceptions, a law which existed in all times and under all circumstances. If you wish to colonize a land in which people are already living, you must provide a garrison on your behalf. Or else – or else, give up your colonization, for without an armed force which will render physically impossible any attempts to destroy or prevent this colonization, colonization is impossible, not 'difficult', not 'dangerous' but IMPOSSIBLE! . . . Zionism is a colonizing adventure and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force. It is important to build, it is important to speak Hebrew, but, unfortunately, it is even more important to be able to shoot – or else I am through with playing at colonialization.[9]

The Military Aspect of Revisionism

From 1923 until well after the creation of the state of Israel, the central focus of Revisionism was its military aspect. In the first years, the key sector of the organization were the brownshirts of its youth movement, the Betar, short for Brit Yosef Trumpeldor, who had been slain in 1920 while defending the little Galilee community of Tel Hai against non-political tribal bandits. It was always militarized both in structure and ideology. At its first world conference, in Warsaw in January 1929, it debated whether to democratically elect its officials or to establish itself on a strictly hierarchic military basis, and decided for a military structure.[10] Although the Haganah had the support of the entire Zionist

movement in Palestine, nowhere in the Diaspora were there mainline Zionist equivalents of the para-military Betar or Brit HaChayal, the Revisionists' ex-servicemen's league. Because the WZO would not grant immigrant certificates to youths who had not gone through vocational training courses, they had to set up farm camps in the Diaspora. But this was largely pro forma. 'Defence sports', and wherever possible military instruction, were always the chief attraction Revisionism dangled before the Jewish youth. The formal ideological baggage of Betar, as well as for the adult movement, was *de minimis*. The entirety of its programme was summed up for them by Jabotinsky in what he called their 'Heptalogue':
1) *Malchut Yisrael*: the kingdom of Israel (without a monarchy), a Jewish majority on both sides of the Jordan.
2) Legionism.
3) Strict discipline.
4) *Hadar*: dignity.
5) *Guiyus*: mobilization. All Betarim coming to Palestine had to put themselves at the disposal of the movement for two years, anywhere and in any capacity it commanded.
6) The Hebrew language.
7) Monism: Jabotinsky opposed what he called ideological *shaatnez* (the Jewish religion forbids believing Jews to wear clothes of mixed wool and cotton).
He campaigned against mixing Zionism with socialism, religion or any other ideal. It will be seen, below, that this was ultimately honoured in the breach, both by the ranks and Jabotinsky himself, but his injunction had the effect of stultifying the movement intellectually with discussion of general social questions being reduced to the barest minimum beyond a few right-wing formulations and some distinctly eccentric social formulations by Jabotinsky. Anyone desiring social equality simply looked elsewhere.

Jabotinsky's Literary Output

The 1920s were literarily prolific for Jabotinsky: in addition to translating some of Dante, Poe, Rostand, d'Annunzio and parts of FitzGerald's Omar Khayyám, he edited a student almanac, writing, among other things, the chapter on table manners, and co-edited the first Hebrew atlas. But by far his most important work was his 1926 novel, *Samson*, originally published in serial form in *Rasswyet*: 'All our generation was brought up on that book,' says his most famous disciple.[11] In 1950 Cecil B. DeMille made it into *Samson and Delilah*, starring Victor Mature and Hedy Lamarr, but the original was much more than the Hollywood version.

Jabotinsky's hero bore little relation to the Biblical figure. Samson is a political, not a religious character. Two 'kingly peoples', Israel from the desert and the Philistines from the sea, have conquered Canaan and are grinding the natives under their heels. But the Philistines are really the

princely ones as the Israelites are weakened by their division into 12 squabbling tribes. The central theme of the book is Samson's acquisition of the secrets of the Philistines' success but these notions take time to develop. What first comes through is the ingrained colonialism and racism of the author. Over and over again we get a totally unsympathetic picture of the Canaanites:

> The rabble of the town-laborers, artisans and beggars – was composed exclusively of the fragments of indigenous tribes, ground past recognition between the two conquering peoples . . . The homeless dogs of the whole neighborhood . . . all looked alike, lacking the characteristics of any known breed, and in this they resembled the human inhabitants of the district.[12]
>
> . . .
>
> – among the Danite women were a number of Canaanite faces belonging to second and third wives, concubines, mothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law – forerunners of the process now beginning by which the heedless native stock was absorbed in the sharp strong blood of the sullen colonizers.[13]
>
> . . .
>
> – Both proved to be well-built, powerful men, and there was in their eyes nothing of that dull look common to the natives. Possibly they had a tinge of Philistine blood.[14]
>
> . . .
>
> – Samson said to him: . . . 'if men come to know each other, there is no enmity between them.' 'I know little of men,' replied Nehushtan, after a short silence. 'I am a shepherd and know about animals. With animals it is different.' 'In what way different?' 'A black dog and a brown dog never fight while each is with his own herd, but put them together and the hair begins to fly'.[15]

Later, when his followers quarrel with their Philistine hosts, 'Samson walked on alone for some time, thinking of the shepherd's wisdom of Nehushtan. A black dog and a brown dog . . . Perhaps.'[16] Soon enough, Samson, the thorough worldling, comes to accept the philosophy of the yokel sage, telling his hosts:

> The second thing I have learned in the last few days is the wisdom of having boundary-stones . . . Neighbors can agree so long as each remains home, but trouble comes as soon as they begin to pay each other visits. The gods have made men different and commanded them to respect the ditch in the fields. It is a sin for men to mix what the Gods have separated.[17]

Samson as an exponent of racial separation did not go over too well with the Philistines, who naturally were well aware of his amorous predilection for *shiksas*, but the man of might had a come-back to their jibes:

> 'Near the temple of Baal-Zebub in Ekron, there is a field full of bees,' he answered. 'None of the priests dare go there to pray, except those who were born with bitter blood, for such men are proof against the sting of bees, wasps and hornets. But there are not many of them, and for the rest to enter the field of bees means death.'[18]

Jabotinsky wanted no more race mixing but he was not about to exclude converts or part Jews or those already married to gentiles from the Jewish people. So, when a prophet tries to get an Israelite to remember the injunction against marrying Canaanites, Samson, acting as a judge, rebukes him. But even here it is the racial strength of the Jews, their 'sharp strong blood', that is decisive:

> 'We are not the water,' replied Samson; 'we are the salt. The others are the water . . . throw a handful of salt in a cask of water and it will not be lost, for all the water in the cask will be made salty.'[19]

Although Jabotinsky opposed race mixing, he constantly stressed that his followers had to learn from gentiles. Samson is more than a mere opponent of the Philistines; he is their best student, and through him Jabotinsky tried to impart some gentile lessons to his young followers. In one of the most dramatic scenes in the book, Jabotinsky gave them the explanation for the power of the Five Cities of the Caphtorim – and of power in the modern world:

> One day, he was present at a festival at the temple of Gaza. Outside in the square a multitude of young men and girls were gathered for the festive dances . . . A beardless priest led the dances. He stood on the topmost step of the temple, holding an ivory baton in his hand. When the music began the vast concourse stood immobile . . . The beardless priest turned pale and seemed to submerge his eyes in those of the dancers, which were fixed responsively on his. He grew paler and paler; all the repressed fervor of the crowd seemed to concentrate within his breast till it threatened to choke him. Samson felt the blood stream to his heart; he himself would have choked if the suspense had lasted a few moments longer. Suddenly, with a rapid, almost inconspicuous movement, the priest raised his baton, and all the white figures in the square sank down on the left knee and threw the right arm towards heaven – a single movement, a single, abrupt, murmurous harmony. The tens of thousands of onlookers gave utterance to a moaning sigh. Samson staggered; there was blood on his lips, so tightly had he pressed them together . . . Samson left the place profoundly thoughtful. He could not have given words to his thought, but he had a feeling that here, in this spectacle of thousands obeying a single will, he had caught a glimpse of the great secret of politically minded peoples.[20]

As in scripture, the blinded Israelite ultimately brings down their temple on the heads of his uncircumcised tormentors, but not before delivering himself of a political homily, as applicable to the roaring twenties as to the second millennium before the common era:

> 'Shall I give our people a message from you?'
>
> Samson thought for a while, and then said slowly:
>
> 'Tell them two things in my name – two words. The first word is iron. They must get iron. They must give everything they have for iron – their silver and wheat, oil and wine and flocks, even their wives and daughters. All for iron! There is nothing in the world more valuable than iron. Will you tell them that?'
>
> 'I will. They will understand that.'
>
> 'The second word they will not understand yet, but they must learn to understand it, and that soon. The second word is this: a king! Say it to Dan, Benjamin, Judah, Ephraim: a king! A man who will give them a signal and of a sudden thousands will lift up their hands. So it is with the Philistines, and therefore the Philistines are lords of Canaan.'[21]

Classic Revisionism laid down the rules by which modern Revisionism still operates. Samson–Jabotinsky's followers still believe that only an iron wall can suppress their latter-day Canaanites, the Palestinians. Samson admired the Philistines, Jabotinsky the British, the modern Revisionists orient toward the Americans although, just as Jabotinsky came to feel that Britain was losing its imperialist lust, so the modern Revisionists always see weakness in America's stance towards the Arabs. Since its strength in the 1920s was not enough for Zionism alone to defeat the Palestinians, it needed a British alliance. Today Revisionism knows it must face the permanent hostility of the broad masses of the Arab world, not merely the Palestinians alone, therefore it must have the continuing patronage of an outside empire which seeks to weaken the Arab nation. But, though the iron wall rises ever higher, the Israeli state is not politically secure. Samson–Jabotinsky failed to understand von Clausewitz's dictum of a century previous: war is only a continuation of politics by other means. Samson–Jabotinsky thought that iron and a king was politics, but it is only an extension of politics. No amount of force can crush the national feelings of the Arab nation, and as it grows politically more mature, the Arab 'tribes', too, will unite, will enter the fray behind a 'king', that is, will become a serious disciplined force. At such a point it will be the vast Arab nation against a mighty but beleaguered Ulster–Gibraltar–Israel that has forfeited world sympathy by its repressive policy of the iron wall. In the 1920s Samson–Jabotinsky's mighty walls and kings seemed like *Realpolitiker* wisdom. It never was, and in today's world it is the guarantee of inevitable defeat be it political or military.

Notes

1. Vladimir Jabotinsky, 'O Zheleznoi Stene', *Rasswyet*, 4 November 1923, pp. 2–4.
2. Jabotinsky, *Turkey and the War*, pp. 225–7.
3. Herbert Solow, 'The Realities of Zionism', *Menorah Journal*, November 1930, p. 100.
4. Jabotinsky, *Story of the Jewish Legion*, p. 19.
5. Shavit, p. 102.
6. Bower Bell, *Terror Out Of Zion*, p. 25 and Syrkin, p. 70.
7. Jabotinsky, 'State Zionism', *Hadassah Newsletter*, October 1934, p. 9.
8. Yehuda Benari and Joseph Schechtman, *The History of the Revisionist Movement*, vol. I, p. 41.
9. Jabotinsky, 'The Iron Law', *Selected Writings*, (South Africa), p. 26.
10. Benari and Schechtman, op. cit., p. 338.
11. Stephen Rosenfeld, 'Straight to the Heart of Menachem Begin', *Present Tense*, Summer 1980, p. 7.
12. Jabotinsky, *Samson* (American edition titled *Prelude to Delilah*), p. 13.
13. Ibid., p. 52.
14. Ibid., p. 148.
15. Ibid., p. 118.
16. Ibid., p. 125.
17. Ibid., p. 131.
18. Ibid., p. 132.
19. Ibid., p. 147.
20. Ibid., pp. 200–1.
21. Ibid., pp. 330–1.

8. The Years of Fascism and Terror

Palestine in the 1920s

Zionism was far from a thriving enterprise in the 1920s. It had its adherents everywhere there were Jews but, not competing for power anywhere – except in far-off Palestine – it gave off a fringe utopian quality, akin to Esperanto or pacifism. Intellectuals conceived of it as little more than a slightly ridiculous attempt to set up a national museum. Many Jews opposed it for its emphasis on the separateness of the Jews. The bourgeois Jewish charities were more interested in aiding the real Jewish communities in Poland and the Soviet Union, and capital investment lagged. Its main strength lay in Poland. With the closing off of emigration to the US, Palestine became attractive to a substantial portion of the conservative and religious petty bourgeois, who saw no future for themselves under the severe discriminations of Prime Minister Wladislaw Grabski, who ruthlessly used every means short of violence to squeeze the Jews out of their economic positions. The influx of small businessmen and artisans caused a brief boom, followed by a severe financial panic. The ensuing depression brought a virtual halt to immigration and in 1927 only about 2,700 immigrants arrived, while more than 5,000 left the colony. The WZO was compelled to set up soup kitchens for the unemployed and actively encourage them to leave Palestine.[1] In order to extend their meagre financial base, the WZO was driven to set up the Jewish Agency as a sort of joint board with the Jewish charities, which, at least nominally, was supposed to represent the Zionist Yishuv in its dealings with the British. The slowing of the pace of immigration, keeping the Jewish percentage of the population down to a still insignificant 16.3 in 1927, permitted a superficial lull in the conflict with the Arabs, but it had merely been transformed into other forms. Economically, competition continued unabated, particularly for crucial government contracts and development projects. At the mass level, the antagonism took on a seemingly sectarian form which finally exploded into a savage pogrom in 1929.

Until the Balfour Declaration, the Zionists looked down with con-

tempt at the pious Chassids who prayed at the Wailing Wall. They shared the opinion, held by all foreign tourists, that the Wall was the symbol of the decadence of the Jewish religious tradition, its degeneration into an other-worldly fanaticism, accompanied by morbid expressions of oral-fixation and squalor. But now the Wall took on a new 'national' significance, both for the Zionists and the Arabs. As a gesture of imperial impartiality toward both Arab and Jew, Sir Herbert Samuel had compensated the Arabs for the pardoning of Jabotinsky by appointing al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni as Mufti of Jerusalem. He became convinced that the Zionists planned to destroy the Mosque of Omar and replace it with a new Jewish temple. He countered the alleged plot by a programme of increased Islamic devotions at the mosque, which included reviving noisy long-forgotten ceremonies at the crown of the Wall, overlooking the narrow alley where the Jews prayed below.

In turn, on Yom Kippur 1925, attempts had been made to set up benches before the Wall, which the British police, at the insistence of the Arabs, removed, even while the services were going on. In 1928, also on Yom Kippur, attempts were made to fasten a screen to the pavement to segregate the women, as is mandatory in an orthodox synagogue. Again the police were called in to remove the screen. The Mufti responded to this latest provocation by ordering the opening of a long-closed gate at one end of the alley, converting it into a thoroughfare for both pedestrians and animals. *Doar Hayom*, the Revisionist daily, began to agitate the Jews for a fight against the Mufti on the issue: 'the wall is ours'.[2] On 15 August 1929, several hundred bourgeois youth, mostly Betarim, the women carrying concealed weapons and explosives, marched to the Wall, and a detachment of Betarim, many carrying knives and sticks, raised the Blue–White flag and sang the Zionist anthem.[3]

The Arabs responded with a counter demonstration at the Wall, with the Jewish beadle being beaten and some prayer books destroyed. Two days later, a Jewish youth chased a football into an Arab garden and was stabbed. The boy died a few days later and the funeral turned into a demonstration. On 23 August, serious Muslim rioting broke out in Jerusalem and rapidly spread throughout the country with many Jewish deaths.

The Hebron Pogrom

A pogrom erupted in Hebron on 24 August with the brutal slaughter of 64 Chassidim, and on the 29th more Chassidim were massacred in Safed. By the time the spasm subsided, 133 Jews had been murdered, most of them anti-Zionist Chassidim, who had lived in peace with their Arab neighbours for centuries, and 116 Arabs were killed, mostly by the police. By no means did all Arabs take part in the pogroms, they were exclusively Muslim, and in many cases, particularly in Hebron, Jews were hidden from the fanatic mob by some of their Muslim neighbours.[4] But the pogroms were a devastating propaganda setback for the Palestinian

cause, particularly because the prime victims had been the anti-Zionist Chassidim.

Both British and Zionist opinion blamed the Revisionists for provoking the outrage through *Doar HaYom*'s inflammatory articles and the subsequent demonstration. Jabotinsky had been out of the country during the pogroms but on his return he rushed to the defence of his movement: the rally had been 'useful and a fine thing'. He insisted that 'it is the main thing in all strategy to force the enemy to attack before he is ready. A year later it would have been infinitely worse.'[5] He went abroad again on 25 December and the British took advantage of his absence to bar him from the country; he was never again to set foot in Palestine.

The 1930s

The Revisionists in the WZO: a Fascist Tendency?

Despite the incident at the Wall, Revisionism continued its rapid growth. By the 1931 World Zionist Congress they had become the third largest tendency in the WZO, with 25% of the delegates. Their major demand became the insistence that the WZO go on record as formally calling for a Jewish state, with a Jewish majority, on both sides of the Jordan. Whether it was to be an independent state, or a 'seventh dominion' within the British Empire was irrelevant to them, the key words in their position were Jewish majority. At that time the Jews were a mere 18% of the population of Palestine – less if Trans-Jordan was taken into account – and most of the Zionist leadership opposed the proposition on the grounds that it could serve no practical purpose and would only antagonize the Arabs. The demand, as with the previous truculence over the Wall, were symptoms of the growing alienation of Revisionism from the mainline leadership with its patient policy of adding 'one more dunam, one more Jew, one more goat' – as one wit put it – to their holdings. Jabotinsky tore up his WZO membership card in disgust at the refusal of the Congress to admit that a Jewish state was the *Endziel* of Zionism, and he began to call for his followers to abandon the WZO. Most of his lieutenants opposed the proposition, arguing that they could gain nothing by quitting the WZO, and Jabotinsky, after a series of compromises, determined to get rid of his internal opposition. On 23 March 1933, he suddenly announced, without the slightest warning or consultation with anyone, that he was superseding the duly elected Executive of their world movement and assuming personal responsibility for the running of the tendency pending a membership plebiscite. To make matters even odder, he announced that he had reversed his previous position. They would definitely attend the 1933 Zionist Congress. The whole faction fight had revolved around staying in or leaving the WZO, and now that he suddenly accepted the position of his opponents, the true question to be decided by the plebiscite was just what kind of movement Revisionism was to be:

merely an extreme faction within the broad parameters of bourgeois general Zionism, or a proto-Fascist party?

The ranks had their say about Jabotinsky's *putsch* on 16 April; the vote was overwhelming: 31,724 (93.8%) backed him and only 2,066 (6.2%) supported the Executive. Thereafter, while dissent was still tolerated, it almost always came from sundry maximalists, who complained that Jabotinsky was not anti-Arab or anti-British or pro-Fascist enough.

It was the Betar that provided the bulk of Jabotinsky's backing, even though most of its leaders had previously opposed him on the question of leaving the WZO. Mordechai Katz, one of the leading figures in Betar, later wrote that his colleagues concluded that Jabotinsky was leading a 'salutary revolution' in Zionist thought and that they had to follow him, right or wrong.[6] The character of the 'revolution' was captured by Katz's own description of the attitude of the Betar ranks to Jabotinsky:

> it frankly worshipped him . . . when a Hitler, a Stalin, a Mussolini have desecrated the meaning of the word 'leader', it was perhaps inevitable that to some confused and shallow minds the Jabotinsky–Betar phenomenon should appear as a reflection of a political trend, for which Rosh Betar had nothing but contempt . . . Leadership, and even cult of personality, which comes from a choice of free men, prompted by faith in and admiration for fellow men endowed by Providence with great minds and valiant hearts, such leadership will always be a blessing.[7]

Jabotinsky had been distinctly unsympathetic toward Fascism in its early years. He loved the liberal-aristocratic Italy of his student days, and identified with the liberal-nationalist traditions that Mussolini despised. In 1926 he had publicly sneered at Fascism:

> There is today a country where 'programs' have been replaced by the word of one man . . . Italy; the system is called Fascism: to give their prophet a title, they had to coin a new term – 'Duce' – which is a translation of that most absurd of all English words – 'leader'. Buffaloes follow a leader. Civilized men have no leaders.[8]

However, this was still the author who had penned those lines about Samson discovering the 'great secret of politically minded peoples' in the 'spectacle of thousands obeying a single will', and it was inevitable that his own fanatic 'Legionism' and hyper-nationalism would attract those who sought a Jewish version of Fascism within the camp of Zion. Whatever his personal reservations about the leader principle, the combination of the pressures from below and the inner logic of his own increasing extremism inexorably led him and Revisionism into the orbit of Italian fascism.

A Middle-Class Movement

At all times and in all countries, Zionism was a middle-class movement. The Jewish haute bourgeoisie never had the least interest in abandoning

their wealth in the Diaspora for remote and poor Palestine, and everywhere the Jewish working class saw its destiny as linked to their fellow workers. It was the untenable position of the Jewish petty bourgeoisie, the 'trading nation' *par excellence*, 'like the gods of Epicurus in the Intermudia', in the 'pores of Polish society', that provided the social base for all of the sundry tendencies of Zionism.[9] They saw themselves between their class rivals of the 'native' capitalist class, who sought to drive the Jews out of 'their' home market, the peasants, who everywhere were organizing marketing co-operatives which replaced the traditional Jewish 'middleman', and the workers, who intended to do away with the entire capitalist system. A portion of the Jewish petty bourgeoisie, more particularly a portion of their children, fully abandoned their class for Marxism. A substantial element, convinced that they could not attain their class ambitions in Europe, sought to continue, as a class, in a new colonial setting in Palestine.[10] The Mizrachi Religious Zionists, the oldest separate faction within the WZO, was, with the exception of the tiny Ha'Poal HaMizrachi grouping, always an avowedly pro-capitalist current. But Mizrachi could never really appeal to the bulk of Jews with any modern education due to its total commitment to the Orthodox religion, which most modern Jewry has abandoned. Additionally, the Mizrachi, perhaps as a direct result of its preoccupation with the precepts of the ancient religion, is singular in that it has never produced a single political thinker of even the slightest stature. The General Zionists were also avowedly pro-capitalist but were divided into two independent factions, neither of which could hope to satisfy substantial elements of the petty bourgeoisie. One grouping, the 'A' faction, became centred in the thriving orange-groves in Palestine, with its wealth based on the exploitation of cheap Arab labour. They had no economic interest in seeing a significant Jewish immigration into Palestine as they had no desire to pay the higher wages they knew the articulate Jews would demand, their greed for immediate profits always was at cross-purposes with their Zionism, and they therefore could never be thought of as potential leaders of the WZO. Faction 'B', identified with Weizmann, fully understood that a premature petty bourgeois immigration could only create problems for the cause by its own anarchic greed, and Weizmann worked closely with the Labour Zionists in developing the Kibbutzim, on the grounds that setting up these idealist collectives was the cheapest method of developing the rudimentary infrastructure necessary for the further expansion of the Zionist economy. He wrote to Baron Edmond de Rothschild in December 1931, telling him of the sharp differences between the 'old settlers', many of whose colonies had been subsidized by the Baron, and the rest of the Zionist movement, because of their use of Arab labour. He went on to denounce those who sloganized about the need for more 'middle-class colonization', complaining that

> gentlemen of this type are utterly unfit for Palestine, and are a positive danger there. Their economic antics can be safely performed only in a country with a very highly developed economic system: their activities are more or less parasitical . . . We saw the whole thing illustrated during the mass immigration – the so-called 'middle-class' immigration – of 1925–26. This immigration had two natural results: first an artificial trade-boom, involving the transfer of an unnaturally and unnecessarily large sum of money from Jewish to Arab hands, and secondly, the inevitable collapse which followed the boom.[11]

In contrast, Jabotinsky saw precisely these elements as the natural clientele of his tendency. He never had the slightest interest in recruiting Jewish workers to Zionism in as much as they had neither money nor the particular skills needed for the development of Palestine.[12] Additionally, they already worshipped before 'another idol', socialism.[13] He fully understood that socialism, if carried to its logical conclusions, was absolutely incompatible with Zionism. In 1932, a student wrote to him, asking why he thought Communism could not be combined with Zionism. His reply was emphatic:

> It is useless here to seek escape by mincing words . . . For Zionist construction two things are necessary – besides people. First a land . . . and secondly – capital . . . more than 90 per cent of the money for reconstruction comes from the pocket of our middle class. Money for the building of Tel Aviv was brought by the middle class, the older colonies were founded by money partly donated by the public and partly from money contributed by large capitalists. And the pure essence of Communism declares for class struggle against the middle class. Wherever it conquers, it must destroy the bourgeoisie, confiscating its large fortunes. That means chopping off the only root from which capital for construction in Eretz Israel can be secured.

As regards land, Marxism was equally anathema:

> the essence of Communism consists in that it agitates and must incite the Eastern nations against European dominance. This dominance in its eyes is 'imperialistic' and exploitative. I believe otherwise and think that European dominance makes them civilized, but that is an incidental question and doesn't belong to the matter. One thing is clear: Communism incites and must incite the Eastern nations and this it can do only in the name of national freedom. It tells them and must tell them: your land belongs to you and not to any strangers. This is how it must speak to the Arabs and the Arabs of Palestine . . . For our Zionist lungs, Communism is suffocating gas and this is how you must deal with it.[14]

Jabotinsky drew what he saw as the necessary corollary from these fundamentals. Strikes might be legitimate in an advanced country but

they could never be tolerated in a developing society such as Zionist Palestine. It was on this point that he came closest to classic Fascism. For all of his opposition to the leadership principle, he insisted that 'Fascism has some good ideas', among these the outlawing of strikes:[15]

> And by 'obligatory arbitration' we mean this: after the election of such a permanent board, recourse to it should be proclaimed as the only legitimate way of settling industrial conflicts, its verdicts should be final, and both strike and lockout (as well as boycott of Jewish labour) should be declared treasonable to the interest of Zionism and repressed by every legal and moral means at the nation's disposal.[16]

Jabotinsky did not go so far as to propose the abolition of the Zionist Representative Assembly; Britain was, after all, a bourgeois democracy and would never tolerate a local Fascist regime in one of her colonies, and he had his genuine reservations as to Fascism's full programme, but as early as 1928 he expressed himself as being in favour of the corporate state, proposing to supplement the Assembly with a 'higher' body:

> If one wishes to endow the System of Arbitration with true and significant prestige, it has to be realized in all aspects of the internal structure of the Yishuv . . . This leads some of us to think about the idea of a Trades' Parliament. First of all, one must create in the Yishuv professional corporations . . . this Trades' Parliament will establish the Arbitration System from the top downwards.[17]

Anti-Labour Measures in Palestine

The Revisionists were not about to wait until they had state power to begin to implement their anti-labour programme. With the ban on Jabotinsky's return, ideological leadership of their Palestinian unit went to Abba Achimeir, Uri Zvi Greenberg and Wolfgang von Weisl, all three devotees of Mussolini. Achimeir, who had a column, *Yomen Shel Fascisti* (Diary of a Fascist) in their newspaper, *Chazit Ha'am*, set up a secret society, *Brit HaBiryonim* (Union of Terrorists), and he began to mobilize his thugs against the Histadrut, writing in his private diary that 'We must create groups for action to exterminate the Histadrut physically: they are worse than the Arabs: bombs into their gatherings.'[18] He made a speech to his followers in Haifa:

> You're no students: you're just so much molasses. There isn't one among you capable of committing murder after the fashion of those German students who murdered Rathenau. You lack that nationalist spirit which dominated the Germans.[19]

Achimeir and his friends began to put together a strike-breaking 'union' and by December 1932 they were strong enough to break a strike

at the Froumine biscuit factory in Jerusalem by providing scab labour. On 27 February 1933, they tried to repeat their success by breaking a building strike in Petah Tikva. Dozens of strikers were arrested for battling the scabs. During Passover, the Betar organized a parade through Tel Aviv, and this time they were roundly defeated in a furious battle.[20] It is to be understood that the Histadrut was itself fighting a race war against the Arab harvesters in the Jewish orange-groves, physically driving them out of their traditional livelihoods, but that is hardly why the Revisionists attacked it. The Biryonim were motivated by fascist malice against its more legitimate activities as a workers' union.

Murder of Chaim Arlosoroff

On 16 June, Chaim Arlosoroff, a labourite, and the Political Secretary of the Jewish Agency, was assassinated while walking on a Tel Aviv beach with his wife. Two Revisionists were accused of committing the crime and Achimeir was charged with conspiracy.

When Hitler had come to power *Chazit Ha'am* had announced that Nazism was a national liberation movement and that Hitler had saved Germany from Communism. Jabotinsky was more than willing to tolerate supporters of Mussolini in his movement but pro-Nazis were a bit too much, even for him. He insisted that they stop running such pieces:

> I demand an unconditional stop to this outrage . . . Should *Chazit Ha'am* publish even a single line which could be interpreted as a new attempt at kow-towing . . . I will demand that its editors be expelled from the party.[21]

The reprimand from the man they considered their own fuhrer was enough to convert Achimeir and company into anti-Nazis. In an about-turn, they began to attack the leadership of the WZO, and particularly Arlosoroff and the Jewish Agency, the executive arm of the WZO in Palestine, for attempting to collaborate with Hitler.

The WZO had done nothing to mobilize the Jewish people – or anyone else – in Germany or elsewhere, to try to stop Hitler from coming to power; with his accession to power they saw their opportunity to utilize the Nazis' Jew-hatred to build their Zion in Palestine. Hitler wanted the Jews out of Germany and the WZO wanted some of them, those with money or skills that could be used to build the national home, to remove to Palestine. Arlosoroff conceived of an elaborate scheme for a 'liquidation bank' to be operated in conjunction with Germany, Italy and Britain, which would gradually transfer German Jewish wealth to Palestine. He went to Berlin to negotiate with the Hitlerites, returning on 14 June; on 15 June, *Chazit Ha'am* ran an attack on Arlosoroff, 'The Alliance of Stalin–Ben-Gurion–Hitler'. The grotesque title interconnected two major themes of the paper's line: the Labour Zionists were scheming to set up a pro-Communist Arab regime and, at one and the same time, to sell out the Jews to the Nazis:

> We have read . . . an interview with Mr Arlosoroff . . . Among other meaningless words and stupidities in which this red mountbank excels, we find that the Jewish problem in Germany can be solved only by means of a compromise with Hitler and his regime. These men . . . have now decided to sell for money the honor of the Jewish People . . . to Hitler and the Nazis . . . Jewry will welcome the triple alliance of 'Stalin–Ben-Gurion–Hitler' with repulsion and detestation. The Jewish People has always known how to deal with those who have sold the honor of their nation and its Torah, and it will know today how to react to this shameful deed.[22]

Arlosoroff was murdered the next night as he and his wife were walking on the Tel Aviv beach. The police used expert bedouin trackers, and two Revisionists, Avraham Stavsky and Zvi Rosenblatt, were brought in and identified by the widow. The police raided Achimeir and found a diary note about a party held in his home immediately after the slaying to celebrate a 'great victory', and arrested him as the instigator of the crime.[23] Upon hearing of their jailing, Jabotinsky immediately issued a statement announcing his conviction that they were totally innocent and would be vindicated.

The 1933 World Zionist Congress

The self-created split in his movement only guaranteed that Jabotinsky would weaken the Revisionist position within the Zionist camp, and in fact their vote dropped to only 14% of the poll for delegates to the August 1933 Congress. Not only had their vote declined, but they were totally isolated due to the Arlosoroff slaying. Nor was Jabotinsky doing anything to improve their image by walking into a Jewish convention, only months after Hitler had come to power, surrounded by a bodyguard of brownshirts. The Presidium promptly banned the uniforms out of fear that they would provoke the labourites.

The WZO leaders said as little as they could about Germany in as much as they knew that negotiations were proceeding to work out a trade agreement with Hitler. Jabotinsky brought forth a motion to support the embryonic anti-Nazi boycott, but it had no chance of success. The delegates were totally put off by the fascist character of Revisionism. During the Congress, Jewish Telegraphic Agency dispatches told of the police discovering Jabotinsky's letter to Achimeir denouncing him for his pro-Nazi articles.[24] The vast majority of the delegates believed that the Biryonim had murdered the Political Secretary of their movement and the letter could only serve to reinforce their opinion. They could only think that their own Hitler was denouncing the WZO leaders for being pro-Nazi. The resolution calling for action against the Hitlerites was soundly defeated, 240 to 43.[25] (In fact the Nazis announced, during the Congress, that a trade agreement had been reached with the WZO's Anglo-Palestine Bank.)

Relations between the Revisionists and the WZO could not have been

worse than they were in the period immediately after the 1933 Congress. The existential reality of Palestinian Zionism, that it had to constantly grow just to hope to keep pace with the Arab birth-rate, coupled with the fact that their finances were exhausted in the midst of the Depression, made it inevitable that the 'practicals' of the WZO leadership would seek to profitably collaborate with Hitler. Jabotinsky did not know it but, at the very time the Congress was meeting, the Jewish expert of the SS, Baron Leopold von Mildenstein, was the guest of the WZO in Palestine. Nor did he know that, in December of that year, Weizmann would ask the Nazis for permission to come to Berlin to negotiate for the further development of the *Ha avara* (Transfer) trade pact into the full-scale liquidation bank envisioned by Arlosoroff.[26] But Jabotinsky himself was negotiating, via the Unione Revisionisti, for a Betar school in Italy. Given his own developing relations with Mussolini, the cynical might think that Jabotinsky would have collaborated with Hitler if he had the responsibility for running the Yishuv. Such would only be speculation and, in fact, he had his principles, even concerning when it was proper to collaborate with anti-Semites. They had to play by the rules, and allow the Jews to protect themselves from pogromists. Hitler, who would never allow that, was clearly an implacable enemy of the Jews. Of course the Revisionists were not the only ones who denounced the Transfer, the Jewish Communist press always covered Zionist Congresses and reported the above-ground aspects of Zionist relations with the Fascists and the Nazis. The Socialist International denounced it and there was immense opposition within the WZO, particularly in Poland, where the Jewish masses instinctively knew that any compromise with Hitler could only weaken them *vis-à-vis* their own anti-Semites; and the US, where the bulk of the Zionist ranks and some of the leadership were infected with the reforming spirit generated by Roosevelt's triumph.

Jabotinsky tried to set up the Revisionists as a boycott organization, but his strategic conceptions were ludicrous. He did not want a 'negative' boycott, no need to tell people not to buy German goods, their own revulsion at Hitler's actions would take care of that. It was better to set up an office to tell people the exact make and model of a competitor's wares that they could buy. The Revisionist Executive did not want to get involved, knowing that a serious boycott effort would take cash, which they did not have. Jabotinsky, a half-time secretary and an unpaid typist were their international boycott staff. Without Jewish unity a boycott could never have been effective and the last movement to unite the Jews was an organization notorious for its terrorist attacks on Jewish labour unions in Palestine. Their boycott campaign dwindled away to nothing. Hitler just was not Jabotinsky's priority: he knew that Hitler was venomous, but did not think the new regime could last; either he would be curbed by the German capitalists or Germany would go broke due to world reluctance to buy German goods. Poland, with its huge Jewish population, was always the Revisionists' prime European focus, and

Palestine remained the exact centre of their universe; it was there that Revisionism was to be seen in its own distinctive Zionist–Fascist character.

The Arlosoroff Trial

Zionist Palestine was at a stage of near civil war, with street skirmishes the order of the day. But the centre of attention was the forthcoming trial of Jabotinsky's most famous co-thinker – he actually called Achimeir 'my teacher and mentor' – although, in reality, he always thought him far too given to 'maximalism' and basically unpolitical.

As has happened before and since in these matters, the accused's attorney attempted to escape from the overwhelming evidence of guilt by concocting an absurd counter explanation for the crime his client had been charged with. In January 1934, an Arab, Abdul Majid Buchari, already jailed for another murder, confessed to the slaying, claiming he and a friend had wanted to rape Mrs Arlosoroff. He recanted a week later, made another confession and recanted again, saying that he had been bribed by Stavsky and Rosenblatt. By any reckoning it would have to be an astonishing coincidence that the Political Secretary of the WZO should be called a traitor and threatened by a fascist clique modelling themselves on the assassins of ancient Judea and then killed in a chance encounter with an Arab murderer; but Jabotinsky insisted that 'this confession looks very much like the truth'.[27]

The case came to trial on 23 April 1934. A British civilian court is a British court even in a colony, and Achimeir was acquitted without even having to put up a defence. The diary was not enough to prove prior conspiracy (though he was held on a new charge of belonging to a terrorist organization). After hearing Rosenblatt's defence, the court cleared him as well, for lack of sufficient evidence. But, by two to one, Stavsky was found guilty and, on 8 June, was sentenced to hang. However, on 19 July the Palestine Court of Appeals overturned the decision on a combination of technicalities. There had been procedural errors committed by the trackers. Once that evidence was thrown out there was no longer any material corroboration to back up the widow's accusation. Unlike the then British rules of evidence, Palestinian law required such verification in capital offences. The Chief Justice was plainly displeased: 'in England the conviction would have to stand', and he denounced the bogus confession:

> The whole interposition of Abdul Majid in this case leaves in my mind a grave suspicion of a conspiracy to defeat the end of justice by the suborning of Abdul Majid to commit perjury in the interest of the defence.[28]

Stavsky's release on a technicality infuriated the labourites, who rioted against him when he showed up in the great synagogue of Tel Aviv, and the charge that they had murdered a fellow Zionist was to pursue the Revisionists throughout the 1930s. There is not the slightest reason to

think that Jabotinsky was involved in the murder, or wanted it or welcomed it, but to think that no Revisionists were involved requires the belief in a series of coincidences, spread over decades. First, it would have to have been mere chance that the incriminating article should appear when it did, threatening Arlosoroff. Then the widow should, inaccurately, identify some Revisionists. The police would then have to find a diary which, only by coincidence, talked of a celebration after the killing. An Arab not even thought of as a suspect, would then have to, of his own free will, suddenly confess to murdering a prominent Zionist. The widow would have to continue to deny that said Arab tried to rape her, and continue to proclaim that the murderers were Jews, presumably out of unmitigated factional malice. Two British courts would have to believe her concoction, one of them even while releasing the victim of her slander; that same court would have to malign his defence attorney as a suborner of perjury. As if that were not an incredible series of events, in 1973, 40 years later, a retired ballistics expert would have to falsely declare that, in 1944, the gun that killed Arlosoroff was found to have been used, in November 1944, by a confessed assassin, a member of a Revisionist splinter group, the 'Stern Gang', to kill Lord Moyne, the British High Commissioner for the Middle East. The forensic expert explained that the same gun had been used in no less than eight Revisionist-connected political killings. The only reason that F. W. Byrd

> did not give evidence of the Arlosoroff connection at the time of the trial of the two murderers of Lord Moyne as the chain of evidence of the Arlosoroff exhibits had been broken during the eleven year gap.[29]

In 1955, Yehuda Arazi-Tennenbaum, an ex-labourite and a former Mandatory police officer, suddenly announced that Stavsky had been innocent and that the Arab had been pressured into recanting his confession. A policeman who admits that he kept silent about a railroading of an innocent man – for 22 years – is automatically suspect. His rationale for why he doubted that Stavsky did it is curious. He had first believed the charge, he maintained, because he thought Stavsky was a different Stavsky, a Communist. When he discovered that this Stavsky 'was a Betari, he was convinced that the police had made a mistake'.[30] The remark about a Communist Stavsky is curious as there was not the slightest evidence connecting any Communist with the killing. It must be remembered that, in 1955, Arazi had no knowledge that Byrd had traced the gun. To accept his story we must add another to our series of remarkable coincidences, this time that one of the police involved should believe Stavsky innocent, keep silent, and then, 22 years later, choose to reveal the truth. To accept Arazi's tale would throw grave doubt on Byrd's 1973 revelation. But Arazi, the policeman, admitted to keeping the facts from the public for 22 years; Byrd, the ballistics expert, had notified the authorities of his evidence, immediately, in 1944. It is

obvious who is the more creditable witness, especially as Byrd's evidence is in harmony with the undisputed evidence presented at the trial – the article and the diary entry, as well as the other evidence adduced then.

Denying that they had anything to do with the killing made it impossible for the Revisionists to defend it on political grounds, namely that they had, in fact, only killed a collaborator with the Nazis, and, therefore, the public saw the question solely as one of whether or not the Revisionists had murdered a rival Zionist. With the exception of some other right wing Zionists, who saw the Revisionsts as part of their wall against the labourites, and failed to see what they did not want to see, the entire political world interpreted Jabotinsky's stubborn insistence on his disbelief in the widow's identification of his followers, and his claims to believe in the incredible Abdul Majid yarns, as proof of the movement's responsibility for the crime.

The Final Split with the WZO

The Biryonim could never win their fight against the Histadrut, their National Labour Union never had more than a tenth of the Histadrut's membership. The Labour Zionist ranks had seen the triumph of Hitler in Germany and Dollfuss in Austria and definitely wanted to destroy their own Fascist menace before it devoured them as well. On 17 October 1934, 100 Revisionists were trapped inside their new Haifa headquarters by 1,500 labourites, and 20 Revisionists had to be taken off to the hospital on stretchers. But the Labour Zionist leadership, which eagerly traded with the Hitlerites, were hardly the ones to carry out a campaign against their own Fascists, primarily out of concern that such a civil war climate would frighten off Diaspora Zionism's middle class following.[31] In August 1934, the Revisionists, sensing that they could never win the uneven conflict that they had provoked, offered to negotiate a pact with the Histadrut, to eliminate violence in conflicts between the factions. The Histadrut ranks opposed compromise, but in October, Pinhas Rutenberg, a Zionist businessman, arranged for a secret meeting between Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky at his London home. On 26 October the two signed an agreement to ban violence in their disputes. Later pacts sought to regulate the relationships between the rival unions and called for an end to the Revisionists' boycott of WZO fund-raising campaigns and, in return, the restoration of the Betarim's right to obtain immigration certificates, which had been denied them because of their strike-breaking. The agreements were unpopular with the ranks on both sides, with Achimeir in Palestine and Menachem Begin in Poland both bitterly opposing them. However, the Revisionists' world congress in January 1935 finally went along with the agreements, but the Histadrut referendum, in late March, overwhelmingly, 15,227 to 10,187, repudiated the pacts. Jabotinsky then called for a round-table conference with the leadership to 'save' the unity of the movement. The leadership was naturally unwilling to treat a minority of their movement as their equals

and, in rebuttal, modified the membership 'shekel' to require that all Zionists adhere to the discipline of the WZO, and Jabotinsky finally decided to consummate the inevitable split. On 3 June 1935, the ranks voted overwhelmingly for their leader's proposition to set up an independent Zionist organization.

Ever Closer to Fascist Italy

By the mid-1930s, in spite of his remaining cavils over Fascism as a system, Jabotinsky increasingly oriented towards Italy. In November 1934, Mussolini set up a Betar squadron at his *scuola marittima* at Civitavecchia. There, 134 cadets were trained by the notorious Blackshirts and, in 1936, Il Duce himself reviewed his Zionist wards.[32] Setting up the school in Italy could only confirm the world's image of Revisionism as Fascist but the imperious Jabotinsky scarcely cared. He wrote to one of his Italian followers, who was handling the negotiations with the regime, that they could have set up the school elsewhere but 'we . . . prefer to have it established in Italy'.[33] By April 1935, Jabotinsky had become little more than a defence attorney for Mussolini and, while in America on tour, he wrote an article, 'Jews and Fascism – some Remarks – and a Warning' for an English-language Zionist paper, the *Jewish Daily Bulletin*:

> Whatever any few think of Fascism's other points, there is no doubt that the Italian brand of Fascist ideology is, at least an ideology of racial equality. Let us not be so humble as to pretend that this does not matter – that racial equality is too insignificant an idea to out-balance the absence of civic freedom. For it is not true. I am a journalist who would choke without freedom of the press; but I affirm it is simply blasphemous to say that in the scale of civic rights, even the freedom of the press comes before the equality of all men. Equality comes first, always first, super first; and Jews should remember it, and to hold that a regime maintaining that principle in a world turned cannibal does, partly, but considerably atone for its other shortcomings; it may be criticized, it should not be kicked at. There are enough other terms for cussing use – Nazism, Hitlerism, Polizeistadt, etc. – but the word 'fascismo' is Italy's copyright and should therefore be reserved only for the correct kind of discussion, not for exercises in Billingsgate. Especially as it may yet prove very harmful. That government of the copyright is a very powerful factor, whose sympathy may yet ward off many a blow, for instance in the League of Nations councils. Incidentally, the Permanent Mandate Commission which supervises Palestinian affairs has an Italian chairman. In short – thought I don't expect street-urchins (irrespective of age) to follow advice of caution – responsible leaders ought to take note.[34]

The apologist for 'fascismo' was naturally quite impressed by the Italian romp over Ethiopia – 'England is now by far not the strongest power in the Mediterranean' – and, by 1936, he became convinced that it was time to shop around for a new mandatory – preferably one with the

proper willingness to use the sternest measures against the Arab
'Logically,' he wrote a friend,

> the *Ersatz* could be either Italy, or some condominium of less anti-Semit
> States interested in Jewish immigration, or a direct Geneva Mandate, or
> fourth alternative which I'll touch upon later. Before June 30–July 15
> sounded alternative no. 1. Result: not yet ripe, not by a long shot.[35]

Jacob de Haas, a co-worker with Herzl, had come over to Revisionis
in the mid-1930s and the old Zionist warhorse had chaired the foundi
congress of the New Zionist Organization, in Vienna, in September 193
On his return to America he described the gathering in his weekly colum
for Chicago's *Jewish Chronicle*: 'The delegates were not fascists, b
having lost all faith in democracy they were not anti-fascist. They we
however very anti-Communistic.'[36] The old man was writing in Americ
he did not consider himself a fascist, which would have been ludicrous
America, so he convinced himself that his comrades were only ant
democratic. But Wolfgang von Weisl, the financial director of the NZ
and its diplomatic representative in Eastern Europe, was certainly muc
more accurate when he told a Bucharest diplomatic paper that 'althoug
opinions among the Revisionists varied, in general they sympathized wi
Fascism'. He assured his interlocutor that 'He personally was a supporte
of Fascism, and he rejoiced at the victory of Fascist Italy in Abyssinia as
triumph of the White races against the Black.'[37] Such opinions made f
much popularity in Rome and it was Mussolini himself who told Dav
Prato, later to become Chief Rabbi of Rome, that:

> For Zionism to succeed you need to have a Jewish state, with a Jewish fl
> and a Jewish language. The person who really undestands that is yo
> fascist, Jabotinsky.[38]

Such was the movement that was now confronted with the Arab revolt
1936.

The Great Palestinian Revolt

The story of the rising has been well told elsewhere and will not b
detailed here. It is sufficient to say that between 1933 and 1936, 164,26
Jewish immigrants poured into Palestine and the Jewish minority rose
29.9% by December 1935. The Arabs could now see the Zionists becon
ing the majority within the country in the near future. Tremendous unre
had followed the 18 November 1935 discovery of a cache of weapons th
the Haganah had tried to smuggle into the country in a cement cargo, an
that same month Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, a popular Muslim
preacher, went into the hills with a guerrilla band. British troops soo
killed him, but the crisis exploded again on 15 April 1936, when
remnant of Qassam's followers stopped travellers on the Tulkarm roa

and killed two Jews. Two Arabs were killed in retaliation, and the funeral of the two Jews turned into a demonstration, with the mourners starting to march on Jaffa, only to be driven back when four of their number were shot by the police. A counter-march soon started out for Tel Aviv and the revolt was on. A spontaneous general strike broke out and pressure from below forced the rival effendi cliques to form an Arab Higher Committee under the Mufti's leadership. Frightened that continuation of what was basically a *jacquerie* would throw the peasantry permanently out of their control, the Palestinian establishment prevailed upon the naive local strike committees to call off the strike on 12 October, pending the outcome of a promised Royal Commission investigation.

The thrust of British policy on Palestine has frequently been debated by historians. The local administrators, like bureaucrats everywhere, wanted as little trouble as possible and they saw that it was Zionism, with its pretensions, that provoked the natives. Inevitably they tended to become anti-Zionist and even anti-Semitic, though even those who affected to be pro-Arab usually saw them as just another race of wogs who needed protection from the cunning Jews. Zionism had its most success with the politicians in London who were at a remove from the local Arab pressures and who tended to think in more strategic imperial terms. But it was the most philosophic of the local administrators, Sir Ronald Storrs, who summed up the British government's overall view. British Jerusalem's first military governor confided, in his memoirs, that the Zionist enterprise was 'one that blesses him that gave as well as him that took, by forming for England "a little loyal Jewish Ulster" in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism'.[39] On balance it must be said that, for all their vacillations, without the patronage of the British, and particularly the presence of the army, Zionism would have been driven into the sea by the overwhelming Arab population.

The entire Zionist Yishuv was more than eager to play the role of the local Orangemen and the WZO's Haganah, dominated by the labourites, previously illegal, and in practice barely tolerated, was enrolled in the Crown's service as 'Ghaffirs' or regular 'native' police, and Jewish Settlement Police, to help the British colonial police administration (who, to make the analogy with Ireland even more literal, were mostly veterans of the infamous Black and Tans). By the end of the revolt, in 1939, no less than 5% of the entire Jewish population was enrolled in these forces. Only the Revisionists remained outside the Haganah. They had split off from it, along with most other right wing Zionists, back in 1931. There had been complaints about its lack of preparedness during the 1929 riots, but the prime reason for the split was opposition to its domination by the Histadrut. The new 'Haganah-B' commander, Avraham Tehomi, was a Revisionist, and in December 1936, he formally agreed that the militia would operate under Jabotinsky's direction. However, it was not until after April 1937, when Tehomi and about a quarter of its 3,000 men, supporters of the Mizrachi, General Zionists and Jewish State Party, with

very few Revisionists, split off to return to the fold of the much larger Haganah, that the group became a genuinely Revisionist force.

At first, Jabotinsky had gone along with the Haganah's defensive *havlaga* strategy of restraint. He had always preferred a fully legal legion, formally affiliated to the military, and he feared that illegal counter-insurgency would choke off that potential. However, there was really no place for a second shadow of the Haganah, and the now fully Revisionist underground, henceforth known as the Irgun (literally, the Organization, from *Irgun Zvei Leumi* or National Military Organization), only made sense as a terrorist grouping. Small-scale actions began in 1936 and, despite Jabotinsky's genuine distaste for such activities – in July 1937 he told a meeting of its high command, in Alexandria, that 'I can't see much heroism and public good in shooting from the rear an Arab peasant on a donkey, carrying vegetables for sale in Tel Aviv' – by November 1937 the Irgun was irrevocably committed to terrorism.[40] The Fascist character of Revisionism expressed itself yet again, with the ranks being eager for extremism and Jabotinsky, their leader, giving in to his maximalists.

Early in September 1937, 13 Arabs had been killed, supposedly in retaliation for the deaths of three Jews. By 14 November the Irgun went on the offensive. Several Irgunists were determined to act on their own and the Irgun command headed them off by organizing a wave of operations that resulted in ten Arabs killed and numerous wounded.[41] Thereafter there were innumerable attacks on purely civilian Arab targets with the high point of the campaign coming in the summer of 1938. On 6 July a milk-can bomb went off in the Arab market in Haifa, leaving 21 dead and 52 injured. On 15 July an electric mine in David Street in the old city of Jerusalem killed ten and wounded 30. On the 25th another bomb in the Haifa market killed 35 civilians and wounded 70. On 26 August a bomb in Jaffa's market slaughtered 24 and injured 35.[42] The Irgun's operations have been documented elsewhere, by friend and foe alike, and it would be tedious to further detail their actions here. However, the historians are in general agreement that, whatever they reveal about Revisionism, their net effect on the outcome of the revolt was absolutely nil.[43] Although the Haganah played a much more important part in defending the Zionist Yishuv, it is indisputable that its role was strictly auxiliary to the main effort of the British army which, using classic colonial repression, bombing from the air, collective punishment, internment without trial, executions, resoundingly crushed the revolt.

Diaspora Revisionism

If, by any objective standards, the Irgun's efforts were inconsequential on the ground in Palestine, the reports of Jewish violence nevertheless had an appeal to Jewish middle-class elements in Eastern Europe, reeling

from the eruption of renewed anti-Semitism in the wake of the Nazi takeover in Germany. The Polish right wing, although apprehensive about Hitler's designs on the Corridor, saw its own anti-Semitism vindicated by the establishment of the new regime in their 'highly cultured' neighbour and Fascist anti-Semitism began to grow, particularly in the universities. As long as Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, the gruff old semi-dictator, lived, the Jews were relatively safe from violence. He had always seen anti-Semitism as a legacy of Tsarist backwardness and he would not tolerate pogroms or, for that matter, any kind of street disturbance. But with his death in 1935, his successors, the 'Colonels', started pandering to the resurgent Jew-hatred, and the 3,300,000 Polish Jews were confronted with both pogrom gangs and ever-increasing official discrimination. In the Baltic states, Austria, Hungary and Rumania, Jews faced similar campaigns, both violent and legalistic, to drive them out of their positions in the economy.

Any class is naturally attentive to a political party that appeals to its interests, but there were additional reasons why the Jewish middle class, or much of it, would not look to more radical alternatives. They had seen the German working class let Hitler walk right through them into power, and crush them, without firing even a single shot. If they looked east they could only be repelled by the Soviet Union, then in the throes of the great purges. With the Jewish situation in their own region turning desperate, and their class position even more hopeless, many middle-class Jews irrevocably turned their backs on assimiliation and looked towards Palestine. But, with the British sharply cutting the Jewish immigrant quota in an effort to mollify the Arabs, official Zionism too began to lose its appeal to Polish Jewry. While much of its following moved toward the Bund, which, unlike any of the Zionists, organized defence squads and fought pitched battles with the pogromists, a substantial element began to go into the Betar. If Palestine was ever to become theirs, it was plain that it could only be by force and the only ones emphasizing both Palestine and militarism within the Jewish community were the Revisionists.

Jabotinsky, hitherto the 'monist', opposed to mixing ideologies, began to pander to the massive Orthodox middle class. He had always been a secularist, never went to the synagogue (except to say the prayer for his father), and did not observe any of the principal tenets of the Jewish religion. Previously he had denounced Orthodoxy for its obscurantism and male chauvinism; now, in 1935, he suddenly injected a 'religious plank' into the platform of his NZO, all about 'implanting in Jewish life the sacred treasures of the Jewish tradition'.[44] He claimed to genuinely profess that 'My . . . generation . . . started by eliminating clericalism and wound up eliminating Godhead . . . We now see into what human nature can degenerate if deprived of Godhead.'[45] While still having nothing to do with Jewish ritualism, he began to talk of how he was 'now convinced that it is sounder to treat . . . ethical fundamentals as connected with a superhuman mystery'.[46] The whole episode is a low point of

his career, even members of his family felt that all of this was palpable demagoguery.[47]

But if the Jewish middle class was all dressed up with some place to go, the question still remained as to just how they were going to get there. With Britain blocking the way to anything like a mass immigration to Palestine, Jabotinsky turned once again to the anti-Semites for patronage. The Zionist movement had never believed that it was possible to solve the Jewish question on Polish soil and mainline Zionism had always sought the support of the government. Weizmann had a meeting with Foreign Minister Jozef Beck, who assured him that if the British ever implemented the partition proposed by their 1937 Royal Commission, Warsaw, in the interest of seeing the greatest possible stage for Jewish emigration, would work to its utmost to guarantee the Zionists the best possible frontiers for their statelet. That same year, Yehuda Arazi, acting as the emissary of the Haganah, secretly purchased machine-guns and rifles from the Polish army to be smuggled into Palestine in steamrollers. Some Haganah instructors were allowed into the country to utilize the weapons to secretly train some of their followers who would then go off to settle in Palestine.[48] But with the WZO tied to the British, who soon abandoned partition and cut the immigration quotas, both as concessions to Arab opinion, it was the Revisionists who became the prime protégés of the regime. On 9 June 1936, Jabotinsky had a meeting with Beck, and on 11 September with Prime Minister Felicjan Slawoy-Skladkowski. In October 1937 he returned to Warsaw to meet Marshall Edward Smygly-Rydz, the new strongman. The Revisionists and the anti-Semites worked out what the Revisionists were pleased to call an 'alliance'.

Proposals for an Exodus

Jabotinsky, for his part, using the Polish press as his vehicle, called for the 'evacuation' of one-and-a-half million Jews from Eastern Europe, the largest contingent to be Polish Jews. In an article written for Jews, he described his thinking:

> I had first thought of 'Exodus', of a second 'departure from Egypt'. But this will not do. We are engaged in politics, we must be able to approach other nations and demand the support of the other states. And that being so, we cannot submit to them a term that is offensive, that recalls Pharaoh and his ten plagues. Besides, the word 'Exodus' evokes a terrible picture of horrors, the picture of a whole nation-mass, like a disorganized mob, that flees panic stricken.[49]

It was, of course, an Exodus that Jabotinsky was proposing, regardless of what he chose to call it; and while the proposition was an instant success with the government, it was completely opposed by all of Polish Jewry beyond the Revisionist camp. Two Zionist dailies which had previously carried his columns immediately severed all connections with

him, but the Revisionists ultimately even went further, in 1939 sending Robert Briscoe, then a Fianna Fáil member of the Irish Dáil (later famous as the Jewish Lord Mayor of Dublin), to make yet another proposition to Beck:

> On behalf of the New Zionist Movement . . . I suggest that you ask Britain to turn over the Mandate for Palestine to you and make it in effect a Polish colony. You could then move all your unwanted Polish Jews into Palestine. This would bring great relief to your country, and you would have a rich and growing colony to aid your economy.[50]

The Palestine Invasion Plan

The Poles did not trouble themselves to ask the British for the Mandate. But they did better: in the spring of 1939, they set up a guerrilla training school for their Revisionist clients at Zakopane in the Tatra Mountains. Twenty-five Palestinian Irgunists were taught the finer points of sabotage and insurrection by the Polish Army. Weapons for 10,000 men were provided for a proposed invasion of Palestine, in April 1940.[51] Poland is a long way from Palestine; how did the Revisionists think they were going to get there? Avraham Stern told the cadets at Zakopane that they were negotiating passage with Turkey and Italy, but there is no evidence that either the Turks or the Italians were in the slightest way involved. By 1936, the Fascist regime had irrevocably moved into Hitler's camp, the school at Civitavecchia was abandoned the following year and Jabotinsky severed all ties with Mussolini. But many within the movement had become so fanaticized in their pro-Fascism that they blamed the Jews for Mussolini's turn to Hitler. Had they not warned the Jews not to attack Fascism? If only the Zionists had supported Italy in the Ethiopian war, then, they reasoned, Mussolini would have maintained his patronage of Zionism. Stern represented this element and, although documentation on this point apparently never existed, it is legitimate to speculate that Stern thought that if the Revisionists could show Mussolini that they were really serious about attacking Britain in Palestine, he would then return to his previous patronage of the movement.

Did the Poles ever really believe in the fantastic plan? It is difficult to say, but it is to be remembered that the world was about to see the world's greatest cavalry ride out to take on Hitler's Panzer Korp. The Colonels were all graduates of Pilsudski's Polish Legion, which had developed similar crack-brained schemes in its day (Pilsudski backed Germany against Russia during World War I, always planning to then turn on the Germans and go over to the French). They saw Jabotinsky as the Jewish Pilsudski, and if Pilsudski could concoct such manoeuvres and come to power, why not Jabotinsky? But even if the invasion never took place, or failed to accomplish anything, the Colonels stood to gain as the Revisionists had to stay in the good books of the regime domestically if their patrons were ever to come across with weapons and training. The thous-

ands of Betarim kept out of the battle against the pogromists. Unless they were attacked, the Revisionists, for all their militarism, never fought their Polish Fascist counterparts. Shmuel Merlin, who spent the last pre-war years in Warsaw as editor of one of the Revisionist papers, has explained that:

> It is absolutely correct to say that only the Bund waged an organized fight against the anti-Semites. We did not consider that we had to fight in Poland. We believed the way to ease the situation was to take the Jews out of Poland. We had no spirit of animosity.[52]

The 1938 Betar Conference

Menachem Wolfovitch Begin was the boy-orator of 1930s Revisionism and it was he who best expressed the increasingly feverish spirit of the Betar ranks in the face of the growing Nazi threat. Their desperation took the form of crying out for the immediate conquest of Palestine. At the 11 September 1938 Warsaw world conference of Betar, the young fire-eater rose to amend their oath. After the Arlosoroff assassination, Jabotinsky had inserted a clause, 'I will raise my arm only for defence', but now Begin insisted on amending it to, 'I will raise my arm for the defence of my people and the conquering of my homeland'. Jabotinsky knew that they had not the slightest chance of beating the British; the whole notion of the invasion of Palestine in 1940 was still obviously only half serious in his mind (presumably it was the chance of getting the guns and the training in the here and now that interested him) and he attacked Begin. There were all manner of noises in the world, he said, but Begin's speech reminded him of nothing more than 'the useless screeching of a door' on its hinge. To him, 'military Zionism' was as one-sided as Weizmann's practical Zionism. He had his own rewrite of the first line of the Bible, 'In the beginning God created – politics': . . . 'If you, Mr Begin, don't believe that there remains a conscience in the world, you have no choice but to go to the deep Vistula River.'[53] Or join the Communists.

New Invasion Plans

In spite of Jabotinsky's polemic against Begin, the amendment was passed. Revisionism was engulfed in a wave of maximalism, the Irgun was increasingly acting independently of Jabotinsky and, once again, he capitulated to his extremists. In August 1939 he informed the Irgun that he wanted to advance their proposed invasion of Palestine, to October of that year. He would lead a boat-load of Betarim who would land on the beach at Tel Aviv. At the same time, the Irgun would seize Government House in Jerusalem and hold it for 24 hours; a Provisional Government would be declared. After his arrest or death, the Revisionist movement in Europe and America would further proclaim a Government-in-Exile. The adventure was clearly patterned after the 1916 Easter Monday rising in Ireland, where the leaders were duly executed after their surrender,

but their gesture triggered off a popular revolution which ultimately led to the British evacuation of the south of Ireland. But, in this case, there is not the slightest reason to doubt that such an exploit could only have led to the destruction of the Irgun as a movement. It is inconceivable that such a venture would have inspired the Labour Zionists, who were the most powerful force among Palestinian Zionism, to follow their hated rivals into revolting against Britain.

To put Jabotinsky's updated invasion plan into full perspective, it must be realized that the Irgun had shifted its attentions from the Arabs to the British in the wake of the May 1939 White Paper, which finally put paid to Britain's patronage of Zionism. The Paper envisioned curtailed Zionist land purchases, limited immigration to 75,000 for the next five years, and an Arab dominated state within ten years. The Irgun's response was to start a bombing campaign aimed at British installations. The British acted much more forcefully in response to the attacks on them than they have ever reacted to the Irgun's campaign against the Arabs, and David Raziel, the commander of the Irgun, was arrested in late May. If that were not enough, on the night of 31 August, the police rounded up the rest of the Irgun's High Command while they were discussing the merits – and demerits – of Jabotinsky's scheme.[54]

If the beheading of the Irgun wasn't sufficient, later that same night, 31 August/1 September, the Nazis invaded Poland, starting a war that Jabotinsky had – repeatedly – insisted was out of the question. On 31 March he had written to his sister saying that 'There will be no war; the German insolence will soon subside . . . in five years we will have a Jewish state.' Within the last week of August, the last week before the war, he wrote that 'There is not the remotest chance of war.'[55] He had become obsessed with the notion that the world would see that the only solution for the Eastern European Jewish question was evacuation, and that the world, which for him, after Mussolini's turn toward Hitler, again meant Britain, would implement it as a way of taking the Jewish question away from Hitler, therefore helping to defuse the war threat. That being his fundamental premise, he allowed himself to believe that the capitalists would not let themselves be dragged into another war which he understood would mean the downfall of at least some of the regimes as had happened in World War I. Even after the outbreak of the war he tried to take comfort in the 'phony war', the period of military inactivity immediately after the Polish campaign, to tell a friend that 'I still don't believe in a genuine war.'[56]

Jabotinsky: The Last Year

When the reality of the war finally sank in, Jabotinsky was quite contrite, but it never occurred to him that an error of such magnitude disqualifies anyone from political leadership. His main concern was that:

> my opponents, who have been always trying to dismiss my political predictions, will now use this error of mine as proof that 'Jabotinsky was again wrong because he was never able to reckon with reality.'[57]

He immediately notified the British that he was shelving his conflict with their Palestinian administration for the sake of the war effort. By late October they released Raziel from detention, but a majority of both the leadership and the ranks of the Irgun refused to accept Jabotinsky and Raziel's position and, under the leadership of Avraham Stern, continued an increasingly isolated mini-war against Britain.

In essence, Jabotinsky came to see the Second World War as a rerun of the First. Again the Jews of Europe were secondary to the potential Jewish state, his central focus became another Jewish Legion, although this time around he understood that it would have to fight on any front, not merely defend Palestine. He knew that the only place he might conceivably recruit for such a force was in the United States and he immediately tried to get there; in the event, he could not leave Britain until March 1940. Until then, he lobbied the London politicians for an army, but with no success. They knew that the Jews would automatically support them against Hitler and such a force could only antagonize the Arab Middle East.

At this time Jabotinsky was engaged in writing his final major work, *The Jewish War Front*. The book is, despite its title, not so much about the war as the post-war solution to the Jewish question in Eastern Europe. Jabotinsky's central thesis is that 'real equality for the Jews in that Zone of Distress – unless a great exodus relieves the situation – is doomed to remain a mirage'.[58] The book must have taken its readers by surprise, certainly they were not used to Jewish authors making excuses for anti-Semitism:

> A gross injustice! Of course; but mere disapproval is useless. The root of the trouble is not hatred of the Jews – that could be combatted, if not eradicated – but something much more elemental and primordial: sympathy with 'one's own people', an instinct which cannot be criticised, because, after all, it is as natural as preferring one's own children to one's neighbor's offspring.[59]

The book has a bizarre quality, especially so to a modern reader of even the slightest enlightenment. There are arguments claiming to demonstrate the impossibility of genuine Jewish emancipation, Jews being smarter than most non-Jews: 'urbanism [has] made the Jew, on the average if not on the summits where genius dwells, better equipped for most of the competitions of modern life'. If they enter into the life of a country they will shine, drawing the envy of the slower gentiles:

> This is the fateful inner contradiction of civic equality for Jews: it can be durable only if it is not enjoyed to the full; yet it is impossible to bring about a voluntary renunciation of such a privilege.[60]

So hundreds of thousands of Jews of Eastern Europe are to go off to Palestine, for their own good as well as the good of those who stay, as well as that of the nations of the region. They will find the good life in the Jewish state, alongside their Arab neighbours, who shall enjoy full equality with the Jews. However,

> whether the Arabs would find all this a sufficient inducement to remain in a Jewish country is another question. Even if they did not, the author would refuse to see a tragedy or a disaster in their willingness to emigrate. The Palestine Royal Commission did not shrink from the suggestion. Courage is infectious. Since we have this great moral authority for calmly envisioning the exodus of 350,000 Arabs . . . we need not regard the possible departure of 900,000 with dismay . . . it would even be undesirable from many points of view; but . . . the prospect can be discussed without any pretence of concern . . . Herr Hitler, detested as he is, has recently been enhancing its (population transfer) popularity . . . his critics . . . disapprove of . . . removing Germans from the Trentino and the Balticum and planting them in fields and houses robbed from the Poles: but it is the robbing of the Poles, not the moving of the Germans, which really elicits the censure. One cannot help feeling that if only Germans . . . Italians and Balts . . . were concerned, the operation might in the end prove not so bad . . . the idea of redistributing minorities *en masse* is becoming popular among 'the best people'.[61]

Jabotinsky arrived in the United States on 13 March 1940. Zionism was at a low ebb in America. Palestine was far from the front, most Jews were numb from the horror that was beginning to be visited on their kin in Poland, and working for a not very likely Jewish army could have no popular appeal when everyone knew that if a young man wanted to fight Hitler for the British Empire, all he had to do was cross over to Canada. The WZO also pushed for a Jewish army, of course with no more success than Jabotinsky.

Jabotinsky soldiered on, he even studied Spanish for a proposed tour of Argentina, but he was extremely depressed by the war in Europe; the condition of the Jews was appalling and, from a narrower Zionist point of view, Eastern Europe had been his stronghold, he could never hope to gain a popular following in the American Jewish community with its then strong left and liberal mentality. He was worn out, physically and mentally. On 1 August he told a friend that he suspected that he had angina pectoris. The next day he was examined by a doctor, who also suspected heart trouble, and who told him to come back for further tests after the intervening weekend. He spent the weekend at a Betar camp at Hunter in Greene County, in the Catskill Mountains, about 130 miles from New York City. He was driven there on Saturday 3 August, arriving there in the evening. He was utterly exhausted and, after briefly reviewing a guard of honour, he was rushed to bed and a doctor summoned. As he

was being undressed he sighed, 'I am so tired, I am so tired'. These proved to be his last words; he did not respond to injections or oxygen and died at 10.45 p.m. A few days later he was buried in a Jewish cemetary on Long Island. He left a will which categorically stated that 'my remains (should I be buried out of Palestine) may *not* be transferred to Palestine unless by order of that country's eventual Jewish Government.'[62] It is a sign of the bitter hostility of Labour Zionism to the memory of the man that David Ben-Gurion routinely referred to as 'Vladimir Hitler' that the Israeli government did not issue such an order until July 1964, 16 years after the establishment of the Israeli state.

A Final Evaluation

By any standards, Jabotinsky was extraordinary. His disciples point to his many talents and see him as Zionism's renaissance man, and others have analogized him to Trotsky, as his movement's great heretic–writer–orator–soldier. Most certainly he had his distinctive virtues and, for all his extremes as an ideologue, he was always essentially an amiable man (though, naturally enough, there is no record of his having any contact with Arabs). Undeniably he was a gifted linguist, fluent in Yiddish, German, Hebrew, Italian, French and English, as well as his native Russian, capable of stunning an Antwerp audience, totally unused to foreigners using their native language, by addressing them in Flemish, or regaling a Scandinavian with quotes from medieval Norse Sagas, or reciting *Die Lorelie* in Esperanto. But even as a linguist his Zionist fanaticism predominated and of Arabic he never learned more than a few curses.

As a stylist, it is as if there were two Jabotinskys. When he wrote politically for a gentile audience he was worthless, he wrote to his audience, and a book such as *The Jewish War Front* is full of the stilted vocabulary of the British upper class of 1940. However, his *Samson* is well researched and the characters, including the necessarily somewhat superman-like hero, are all believable, yet the tale as he tells it gives off a yellowed quality, like the very pages of the book itself as one encounters it in libraries. It is its blatant racism and old fashioned imperialism, no longer found in serious modern literature, that makes it into a museum curio.

It was as a polemicist in the Zionist press that he was at his best and he could give off an extremely clear and authoritative quality, which he ascribed to his linguist's grasp of grammar as well as his penchant for drawing logical, even if necessarily extreme, conclusions from common Zionist premises. Thus, when he discusses the absolute necessity of force for the success of Zionism, or its total dependence on capitalism, he is definitive, even oracular. But he could never confine himself to such truths; his decades of association with Russian and then British reaction

gave him not only an imperial but an imperious political mentality which drove him over to the world ultra-right. His vivacious *bonhomie* could not mask the fact that he was, at the very best, an extreme reactionary, an avowed collaborator with anti-Semites, an apologist for Benito Mussolini, and often little more than an absurd political crackpot.

In the end, his interest for the historian will have to lie in his being the mentor and idol of his world famous disciple, whose first act as Prime Minister of Israel was to put Jabotinsky's portrait on the wall of his new office.

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42. Israel Shahak (ed.). *Begin and Co. As They Really Are*. p. 12.
43. Daniel Levine. *David Raziel. The Man and His Times*. p. 229.
44. **Schechtman, p. 287.**
45. Ibid., p. 286.
46. Ibid., p. 289.
47. Ibid.
48. Yehuda Slutsky. 'Haganah'. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. vol. 7. col. 1069.
49. Jabotinsky. 'Evacuation – Humanitarian Zionism'. *Selected Writings*. (S. Africa), 1962, p. 75.
50. Robert Briscoe. *For the Life of Me*. p. 268.
51. Nathan Yalin-Mor. 'Memories of Yair and Etzel'. *Jewish Spectator*. Summer 1980, p. 33.
52. Shmuel Merlin (interview with author). 16 September 1980.
53. **Levine, p. 80.**
54. Yalin-Mor. p. 36.
55. Schechtman. p. 366.
56. Ibid. p. 367.
57. Ibid.
58. Jabotinsky. *The Jewish War Front*. p. 12.
59. **Ibid., p. 62.**
60. Ibid., p. 109.
61. Ibid., pp. 220–2.
62. Schechtman. p. 400.

9. Menachem Begin: the Early Years

In contrast to Jabotinsky, there is very little material available about Begin's early life. As we shall see, he does not write or speak much about his pre-Palestinian career, a fact to be attributed to the inevitable embarrassment that would accrue to him if he had to detail his role in Betar during its period of intimacy with Mussolini and the Colonels. Additionally, many of those who knew him during that era, friend and foe alike, were murdered by the Nazis, and the newspapers, movement files, public records of the day, were destroyed. However, he does have his biographers. These not only had to work under these difficult circumstances but, in varying degrees, they brought to their subject a preconceived sympathy or, at best, an attitude of cautious neutrality. Their chapters on his early life are therefore padded out with extraneous material about the Jews, Eastern Europe, Zionism and Revisionism, mostly superficial, much of it propaganda, all to fill in the blanks created by their subject's unwillingness to come to grips with the Fascist side of his past. Readers may verify this description of the severe reference limitations therefore imposed upon the present author by examining Begin's own *White Nights*, which deals with his 'Soviet' period, 1939–42, and *The Revolt*, his memoir of the Irgun underground, 1942–9, as well as the three biographies cited below.

Childhood

Menachem Wolfovitch Begin was born in Brest-Litovsk, Brisk in Yiddish, a small city of approximately 40,000, over 55% Jewish, on the River Bug, in what is now the Byelorussian Soviet Republic, on 16 August 1913. His father, Wolf Dov Begin, the son of a timber merchant, frequently worked for his own father, but his prime career was as the secretary of the Jewish religious community. His mother, the former Hasia Korsovsky, was descended from a venerable rabbinical family, also involved in the timber trade. His father was a committed Mizrachi religious Zionist who had already named his first son Herzl (their firstborn was a daughter, Rachel). Their third child was named Menachem, meaning 'comforter',

because he was born on the 'Sabbath of Consolation', the first in the ancient Jewish calendar following the 9th day of the month of *Av*, the day upon which the Orthodox mourn for the destroyed temple of Jerusalem.

The First World War broke out the next year and Menachem's father, as with many of the Tsar's Jewish subjects, was pro-German, apparently outspokenly so. The military authorities expelled him from the town, and he went off to Moscow and later St Petersburg and Warsaw. Menachem's mother and her three children were themselves forced to flee the city before the oncoming German army, ending up in Kobrin, further east, in the direction of the Pripet Marches. Four years later, after the war, Wolf Dov returned to Brisk, and a year later his family rejoined him. The city was alternatively taken by the new Polish and Soviet armies, ultimately it was held by Poland. Begin, who was seven when the Red Army briefly occupied the city, has two memories of their visitation: a soldier coming to their door to beg a slice of bread, and a Jewish woman commissar who was billeted with them. The young Menachem took an instant dislike to her for her mannish ways. He additionally claims he was repelled by her insistence that she would have had no hesitation in shooting any of their enemies.[1] The Polish army teemed with murderous anti-Semites; one might think Wolf Dov would have been sympathetic to the Red Army, led by a Jew, Trotsky, and which fought the anti-Semites; but that was certainly not the case. As a capitalist of a sort, a religious dignitary and a Zionist, he abhorred them, and Menachem seems to have strongly incorporated these paternal values directly into his own superego.

Another incident, when he was 10 or 11, also involving his father, powerfully moulded his character: he had been walking with his father and a rabbi when two Polish soldiers tried to cut off the rabbi's beard. Wolf Dov struck one of them with his walking stick and he was taken off to the local fortress and horse-whipped for his pains.

> My father returned home badly beaten but he was in good spirits, for he was convinced he had done what was right. . . . We were all very proud of his behaviour – an example for all the inhabitants of the Jewish community.[2]

Begin insists that his father's example has always been clearly before him:

> In all my life, I never met a more courageous man than him. It has been given to me almost all my life to work with people of courage, but I will never forget the way in which my father fought for the defense of Jewish dignity.[3]

Although Yiddish was the language of their home, his father wanted his son educated in an all-Hebrew school, and at the age of seven Menachem had been enrolled in a Mizrachi elementary school. Thus in Poland, where two-thirds of the people were Polish speaking, and the vast majority of the 10.5% of the population who were Jewish could not

carry out even a simple discussion in Hebrew, Menachem was pushed into a rarified and isolated Zionist environment, compounded by the fact that the Mizrachi, with its strict orthodoxy, was a minority even within Zionism. The intellectual value of his primary education will best be appreciated if it is understood that the Mizrachi has yet to have produced a single ideological leader of the first rank, even within Zionist terms, still less within the wider world of political discourse. Wolf Dov's Zionism was of the most philistine middle-class variety, little more than the most primitive secularization of his intense sectarianism, strictly of the stay-at-home variety, much more related to his Jewish identity than to a real place with real people called Palestine.

At ten years of age, the future prime minister made his maiden political speech, wearing knee-breeches and a Yarmulka, perched on a table top. The occasion was the minor spring festival of Lag B'Omer. Traditionally a gay affair, with bonfires and boys playing with bows and arrows, it is identified with Bar-Kochba, the hero of the last Judaean revolt in AD 135, and the Zionists could not resist turning it into a day of nationalist oratory.

Two years later, in 1925, he joined his first formal Zionist group, the *Hashomer Hatzair* (Young Guard). Today the Hashomer is the youth section of the *Mapam* (United Workers) Party, a minor Israeli faction that tails after the much larger Labour Party; in those days it was a scout movement. The next year, however, the grouping took a turn towards a utopian socialism of the vaguest kind. This was too much for the narrow-minded Wolf Dov, who convinced his son, all of 13, to leave the organization, and Menachem irrevocably turned away from the left, even within the circumscribed context of Zionism, telling his ex-comrades that, as Jews, they should 'first fight for your own freedom, then worry about the freedom of others'.[4]

At 14, Menachem was transferred to a Polish government school, where he was one of only three Jews. Apparently the shift was due to a lack of money for tuition at the private Jewish school. It is probable that he would have disappeared into later obscurity if he had not been transferred out of the confines of the Mizrachi educational environment. In his new school he was introduced into the broader world of European culture, acquiring his life-long love of world literature, beginning with Virgil and other Latins in the original. Since the Polish middle class was permeated with anti-Semitism, it was inevitable that the boy should have his fair share of fights, but this seems to have only further steeled his character.

Although his biographers mention a few other incidents in his pre-Revisionist phase, these are but the merest anecdotes. If, as clearly seen, his father's intense Jewish communalism and Zionism moulded his life, with his conversion to Revisionism his individual reality completely merged into the history of that movement. He first heard Jabotinsky in 1929, when aged 16, in Brest-Litovsk. It is easy to see the attraction

Revisionism would have on him. The Begin home was intensely Jewish, Zionist, pro-capitalist and reactionary, and Jabotinsky was all of these in extreme. Wolf Dov and his entire brood had found their messiah. It was the most natural thing possible for the youthful Menachem, in no way requiring the slightest ideological break with his environment.

Betar

Begin joined and rose rapidly within the fast-growing Betar; by the next year he was already their commander in the town. In 1931, while still only 17, he left for the Law School at the University of Warsaw 'so that I might be able to defend the poor and the oppressed', he wrote then.[5] He was soon co-opted onto the national commission of the movement and assigned the administrative 'portfolio'. Today Zionism is in power and, notoriously, one of the most bureaucratically well-paid ideologies in the political world but, in those Depression days, Zionism, and particularly the minority Revisionists, was a 'pure', that is to say poor, movement, and the young zealot lived on one meal a day and boarded at the Jewish students' hostel, earning a little pocket money tutoring local gymnasium students in Latin. He graduated in 1935 and, although he never practised, the school left an indelible mark on him. The Departmental specialty was courtroom oratory and there was a regular course in diction and rhetoric given by a leading actor from the National Theatre. To this day Begin is primarily renowned within the Zionist world as one of its greatest orators and, while he has two books of memoirs to his credit and for many years wrote a weekly column for his movement's paper in Israel, he would be the first to concede that he is neither a historian nor a writer in any serious sense of those words.[6]

The Betar was a growing movement, both world-wide and in Poland when Begin joined it, and it continued to grow until the Arlosoroff assassination, when Jewish public opinion turned sharply against it. Begin accompanied Jabotinsky on a tour of the country in defence of Stavsky and was subjectively involved in the case through the family, who had been among his neighbours in Brest-Litovsk.

On 14 March 1982 Begin, as Prime Minister of Israel, announced the setting up of an official commission to investigate the murder, after the publication of a book suggesting that Stavsky and Rosenblatt were guilty.[7] The commission was to be set up despite the sharp dissent of two members of his cabinet, who could not see the point in reviving the case and opening up old wounds. That Begin would persist in doing so is doubtlessly testimony to the fact that he did not believe, at that time, that they had done it, though his or their subjective feelings on the matter can hardly be determining for us, who have to go by objective evidence. (Merlin, for one, although he has broken with Revisionism, still believes

that Mrs Arlosoroff was behind the slaying, that she thought her husband was guilty of infidelity.)[8]

By 1935 the 22-year-old Begin was one of the leading figures within the world Betar, sitting on the dais of their World Congress that year in Crakow, along with Jabotinsky. In September 1935 he took over the propaganda department of the Polish Betar. It is to be understood that although the Polish Revisionists were anti-Nazi, and organized their own boycott demonstrations, at least in the early years of the Hitler regime, Palestine, not Germany, was the centre of their attention. It was in connection with an April 1937 demonstration against Britain that Begin's name first appeared in the English language, in the obscurity of the *Jewish Telegraph Agency News*, the daily bulletin of the Zionist wire service which, on 5 April, told of:

> 400 members of the right-wing Zionist organization Brit Trumpeldor [who] demonstrated outside the British Embassy against the British Administration in Palestine . . . Four of the ten youths arrested during the demonstration were in jail. One is Moshe Biegun, a leader of the Brit Trumpeldor.[9]

The security police forbade any kind of demonstrations and Begin was held for a few weeks; but the Revisionists were not leftists, and after a little lobbying with their contacts within the regime, he was released. That same year he spent five months in Czechoslovakia as the acting commander of the national Betar.

The 1938 Betar Congress

It was in September 1938 that Begin received his only major public rebuke from his mentor. Begin has never publicly referred to the incident – it is too painful, personally and politically – but it was at the Warsaw Third World Congress of the Betar, while the young enthusiast was putting his most decisive stamp upon pre-war Revisionism. It was a time of terrible pressure on the Jews. Hitler had taken Austria and Czechoslovakia, the Loyalists were losing in Spain. Israel Sheib (Eldad), then a close friend of Begin's, later described the mood of the Betar:

> thousands upon thousands waving their hands with nothing to do . . . The Betar group had passed the saturation point. How long can you hold revolutionary tension from bursting forth with duels and with the writing of petitions? . . . If it were not for the Trotskyite trials in Russia, there is no doubt that thousands upon thousands of the cream of Jewish youth thirsty for action and redemption would have joined the communist movement that fought and was being persecuted.[10]

Begin got up to propose that a clause of their oath of allegiance be changed from 'I will raise my arm only for defence', which Jabotinsky had

inserted into it after the Arlosoroff affair, to 'I will raise my arm for the defence of my people and the conquering of my homeland.'

> Until now the Zionist movement's answer had consisted of political activity, settlement, mass immigration, moral pressure, making common cause with the British and maintaining faith in the League of Nations and the conscience of the world. Now, all is changed: the conscience of the world has ceased to react, and the League of Nations has lost its value. Our British partner leads us to the gallows and imprisons the finest of our nation.
>
> Our good friends the British offer us five per cent of Eretz Yisrael and give primary consideration to the Arabs in appeasement of their nationalist ambitions. We want to fight – to conquer or perish. After practical Zionism and political Zionism, we must now enter the age of military Zionism. We must amass strength that will not be dependent upon the mercies of others. If such a force is created, the world too will come to our assistance.[11]

Jabotinsky said he understood the anguish of the youths, but he had to take a stand against Begin on both practical and moral grounds:

> There are all sorts of noises . . . Most of us, I imagine, are used to the screech of machines. Yet it is hard to suffer the noise of a door (screeching) because it is pointless. The words that we have heard from Mr Begin represent just such a noise, and noise like that must be ruthlessly suppressed.[12]

He had written far too many articles in his time to be told that public opinion had no meaning, and he came down full force on his disciple's cynicism:

> If you, sir, have stopped believing in the conscience of the world, you'd best go to the Vistula and drown yourself in it. Your alternative would be to take up Communism.[13]

Begin called for 'rebellion in the Irish style'.[14] Jabotinsky prided himself on being serious about militarism and he poured scorn on the analogy: 'What kind of "Irish-style" rebellion would we be capable of waging in Eretz Yisrael? The Irish live on their own soil. But we?'[15] Begin had his supporters, among them Uri Zvi Greenberg and Avraham Stern and other Irgunists who had come to the Congress from Palestine, and Israel Scheib (Eldad) defended his friend: a creaking door could be of use if it woke someone up so that he could save his house from a burglar.[16] But Jabotinsky interrupted several of Begin's partisans to suggest that they join him in committing suicide. During a break in the sessions they got together to set up a 'Suicide Club', complete with 18-point constitution, motto and insignia, and submitted their work to Jabotinsky for 'ratification'. Jabotinsky saw the humour of it and playfully approved it:

'So be it. Vladimir the First.' Begin's amendment passed and he hastened to heal the breach, formally declaring that 'Betar, in all of its branches, its camps and standards, stands ready for your command.'[17]

The aftermath of the Congress and Jabotinsky's capitulation to the hysterical mood conditioned by the desperate situation in Europe have been previously described; it suffices here to remark that the affair illustrates the undistilled fanatic quality of Begin's thinking at the time. Cynicism always parades as the latest word in realism but is only a caricature of it. When someone presumed to challenge him, asking just how they could get the invading force into Palestine, much less – simultaneously – beat the British, the Labour Zionists and the Arabs, he cavalierly dismissed this obviously valid concern with: 'I am suggesting an idea. The experts will say how it is to be done.'[18]

The Eve of World War II

Polish Revisionism in the period between the Congress and the outbreak of the war was totally dominated by the most fascistic and militarist elements in the movement. Abba Achimeir had been deported to Poland by the British after serving a period of internment for running a terrorist organization. The training camp at Zakopane also brought Avraham Stern into the country. He started organizing secret cells in the Betar and the adult movement with a higher loyalty to the Irgun. The militarists even set up their own newspapers. They were increasingly publicly contemptuous of Jabotinsky, and he in turn grew more concerned about their influence. In the spring of 1939 the then commander of the Polish Betar stepped down in preparation to emigrating to Palestine. The second in command decided that he was not cut out for the leadership position and, in April, Jabotinsky appointed Begin to the post. He was the perfect choice. He had demonstrated his loyalty to Jabotinsky at the Congress, in spite of the political quarrel, while maintaining close personal relations with Stern and such as Nathan Yalin-Mor, the editor of the Irgun paper *Die Tat* (The Deed). Ideologically he fell in with the avowed Fascist, Achimeir. Yehuda Benari, director of Israel's Jabotinsky Institute, and author of the article on Begin in the *Encyclopaedia of Zionism and Israel*, relates that, on his return to Poland from Czechoslovakia, 'he joined the radical wing of the Revisionist movement, which was ideologically linked with the Brit HaBiryonim'.[19]

Begin settled into his new position. He moved into a rented room in downtown Warsaw and entered a law firm as a legal clerk to do his articles. On 29 May, he and Aliza Arnold, also a Betari, both in their brownshirt uniforms, were married by a rabbi. While Palestine remained the centre of his universe, and he deeply involved himself in the illegal immigration to Palestine, the possibility of war had to be considered very real in Warsaw in the spring of 1939, whatever Jabotinsky in far-off Pont d'Avon might think. Accordingly, he took part in the delicate negotiations with Captain Runge, the head of the local security police, concern-

ing a pet Revisionist scheme: they wanted the Poles to set up segregated Jewish units in the army, with Poles in command, of course; then, presumably after the Poles and Jews had dealt with the German army, the Jews, without Polish officers, would go on to conquer Palestine.[20] The plot failed because the Bund, which had taken 70% of the Jewish vote in the January 1939 municipal elections, had always strenuously resisted every effort to segregate the army, and the Poles knew they would resist any such attempts then. Additionally, the government was aware that there was a sharp decline in anti-Semitism among the Polish middle class in the face of the threat coming from Germany as even the most obtuse could see that anti-Semitism could only divide the country in the face of the common enemy.[21]

When Jabotinsky came to Warsaw in June 1939 he was disappointed to discover that even their friends in the government now found the Jewish question to be 'secondary'. He lamented that he could do no more, eventually he was certain anti-Semitism would revive, when the war threat would blow over, as he was sure it would. But then it would be too late, and the Jews would find that 'the initiative of reviving Great Zionism will have to come from the anti-Semitic camp'.[22] Thus, on the eve of the Holocaust, Poland was treated to the spectacle of the Revisionists, with Menachem Begin, the future Prime Minister of Israel among their leaders, pleading for a more anti-Semitic policy than the government either dared or cared to implement.

Notes

1. Eitan Haber, *Menahem Begin*, p. 18.
2. Frank Gervasi, *The Life and Times of Menahem Begin*, p. 81.
3. Lester Eckman and Gertrude Hirschler, *Menahem Begin*, p. 19.
4. Haber, p. 24.
5. Gervasi, p. 87.
6. David Rosenthal, 'Menahem Begin: From Oppositionist to Prime Minister', *Jewish Frontier*, August 1977, p. 9.
7. David Landau, 'Cabinet To Set Up Commission Of Inquiry Into Arlosoroff Case', *JTA Daily News Bulletin*, 15 March 1982, p. 2.
8. Shmuel Merlin, (interview with author), 16 September 1980.
9. *JTA News*, 5 April 1937.
10. Daniel Levine, *David Raziel, The Man and His Times*, pp. 239–40.
11. Gervasi, p. 94.
12. Haber, p. 50.
13. Gervasi, p. 95.
14. Ibid., p. 94.
15. Ibid.
16. Eckman and Hirschler, p. 45.
17. Haber, p. 51.
18. Ibid., p. 50.

19. Yehuda Benari, 'Begin, M'Nahum', *Encyclopaedia of Zionism and Israel*, vol. I, p. 116.
20. Menachem Begin, 'Menachem Begin Writes', *Jewish Press*, 13 May 1977, p. 4.
21. Joseph Schechtman, *Fighter and Prophet*, p. 360.
22. Ibid., p. 361.

10. Begin During the Holocaust

Exodus from Poland

The German invasion of Poland shattered the Revisionist fantasy of a Polish-based invasion of Palestine. During the first days of the war the government carried on with some of its regular functions, which meant continuing to encourage Jewish emigration, even in the teeth of the war and its manpower needs. Two of Begin's biographers write that he and his wife, as well as their friends, Nathan Yalin-Mor and his wife, were given exit visas.[1] However, the government quickly decided to abandon the capital for a new defence line on the Bug, and called upon all able-bodied men to leave Warsaw. The leaders of all the Jewish idological tendencies, without exception, followed the governmental order. If Begin and Yalin-Mor and their wives intended to retreat to the Bug, the proposition became quite academic with the entry of the Soviet army into the eastern territories and the total route of the Polish army. Begin does not pretend that he intended to stay in Poland, and he told an interviewer in 1977 that:

> With a group of friends, we reached Lvov (Lemberg) in a desperate and vain effort to try to cross the border and try to reach Eretz Yisroel – but we failed. At this point, we heard that Vilna would be made the capital of an independent Republic of Lithuania by the Russians.[2]

The Bund's leaders left Warsaw with the greatest reluctance, convinced that they could not have got the Jewish masses to make a last-ditch suicidal defence of their homes and families, and that any attempt to do so would have brought down the wrath of the Poles, who would have blamed the Jews for the further destruction of their capital. However, they had underestimated their comrades of the *Polska Partja Socjalistyczna*, who decided that it was psychologically crucial for the development of the future resistance that the capital not fall without a battle. They convinced General Tshuma, the commandant of the garrison, to countermand the evacuation order. When the Bund's central committee reached the Bug

and heard of the decision they instructed two of their leading figures, Bernard Goldstein and Viktor Alter, to return to the city. There is no evidence that any of the Zionist parties made any similar attempt to send representatives back to Warsaw and its Jews.

Begin and Yalin-Mor were not alone in fleeing to Vilna. Amongst the more prominent of the refugees were Moshe Sneh, the chairman of the Polish Zionist Federation, Zerah Warhaftig of the Mizrachi, and the central committees of both the Hechalutz and the Hashomer Hatzair. Within the next few months, only the youths of the Hechalutz and Hashomer made any effort to return any of their leading cadres to German-occupied Poland. The rest of the Zionist leadership in Vilna sought, and in many cases succeeded in obtaining, immigration certificates for Palestine and turned their backs on their kin, their movements and their people. According to two of Begin's Revisionist biographers, he was condemned by his Palestinian comrades for his flight from Poland:

> he received a letter from Palestine criticizing him for having fled from the Polish capital when other Jews were stranded there. As captain of Betar, the letter stated, he should have been the last to abandon the sinking ship. Begin was torn by feelings of guilt; it took strenuous efforts on the part of his comrades to keep him from this impulsive act, which probably would have cost him his life.[3]

In his post-war book, *White Nights*, which deals with his Lithuanian and Soviet period, Begin does not refer to any such letter. Instead he attempts to justify his flight from Warsaw: 'There is no doubt that I would have been one of the first to be executed had the Germans caught me in Warsaw.'[4] There is no reason to believe that this would have been his fate. While all Jews were subject to savage oppression, there was never any special persecution against either Zionists as such or Revisionists in particular at any time during the German occupation. To the contrary, even after the invasion of the Soviet Union, Josef Glazman, Begin's counterpart as head of the Lithuanian Betar, was appointed inspector of the Jewish police in the Vilna ghetto. There can be no doubt that Begin simply abandoned his Polish comrades. The Revisionist historian Chaim Lazar-Litai is brutally frank in describing the isolation of the Polish movement:

> at the time when panic and chaos reigned in Warsaw, the Betar rank and file was left leaderless, without help or guidance . . . the Revisionist movement was the only Jewish body in the Ghetto that was not in touch with its central institutions abroad.[5]

At no time did Begin ever intend to return to Poland. In *White Nights* he wrote that he informed his Stalinist interrogators, in 1940, in Vilna's Lukishki Prison, that

> I had received a *laissez-passer* from Kovno for my wife and myself and also visas for Palestine. We were on the point of leaving, and it is only my arrest that prevented me from doing so.[6]

A few pages later he put in, as an afterthought, 'We were about to leave . . . but we had to surrender our places to a friend.'[7]

Begin's Motives for Fleeing

Begin was scarcely motivated by cowardice in his abandonment of his movement in Poland, but rather by his political perspective. With the exception of the few anti-Nazi boycott demonstrations that the Revisionists had organized in the early years of the Hitler regime, the struggle against Nazism was never a priority for his movement, and certainly they had done nothing to mobilize the Jewish masses against Polish anti-Semitism during the pre-war period. There can be no doubt that he also completely shared his mentor's conviction that, even after the war, there could be no future for Polish Jewry. What sense was there in returning to a situation that was not only horrible in the immediate here and now, but which was historically an anachronism, devoid of any solution at ground level? Begin had become famous within his movement for his unique prescription for the Jewish dilemma: the immediate conquest of Palestine. A fanatic amongst fanatics within Revisionism; seeing the rival leaders of the mainline Zionist currents also frantically scrambling for immigration certificates, it was impossible for him to suddenly reverse course, to place the organization of an underground struggle above his voyaging to Palestine. He was not fleeing from the greatest disaster in Jewish history, he was rushing towards the only opportunity for a Jewish future.

Today, in the post-Holocaust era, we all understand that Hitler's crime was so humanly overwhelming that not even a profound fanatic such as Begin can escape guilt feelings over his decision to abandon Polish Jewry. Every once in a while, Begin, who never hesitates to try to use the Holocaust to blackmail his gentile critics, shows his psychological ambivalence over the Holocaust. The October 1977 issue of *Martyrdom and Resistance*, organ of the American Federation of Jewish Fighters, Camp Inmates and Nazi Victims, reported the furious opposition of the entire survivors movement to a proposal by the new Israeli Prime Minister to abandon the decades-old Israeli day of special commemoration for the Holocaust, the 27th of the Jewish month of *Nissan*, and merge it with the *Tish of Av* commemoration of the destruction of the ancient Jewish temples of Jerusalem.[8] (The proposal sank without a trace.) Equally bizarre was his remark, made to the Knesset, on 2 March 1982. Begin rose up to ask the body: 'How many people in Parliament are there who had to wear the Star of David? I am one.'[9] Begin fled before the Nazis, and there were no yellow stars in Lithuania while he was there.

Arrest of Begin

According to a 28 September 1939 amendment to the Nazi-Soviet pact, Lithuania, excepting a south-western region, was placed in the Soviet sphere of influence. On 10 October Vilna has handed over by the Soviets to the Lithuanians and the Red Army was 'granted' several bases in the country. On 15 June 1940, the Red Army fully invested the country, with formal annexation coming on 3 August. On 1 September, a messenger appeared at the house the Begins shared with Israel Scheib (Eldad), with an 'invitation' for Begin to come to the town hall to deal with an 'application' that he was alleged to have made. Begin understood that, as he had made no such application, the invitation was from the secret police. He made no effort to escape: 'my decision was not simple, but I will not go into it'.[10] There can be no doubt that the events of the war, the destruction of Poland, the conquest of France, the Soviet occupation, and the news of Jabotinsky's death, had demoralized him. He knew that he could hide out, at least for a brief period, but, with his world being destroyed by the two great dictatorships of the time, his new-found pessimism is easily understandable. At a memorial for Jabotinsky he had recently told the gathering that 'We will yet have the privilege of fighting for Zion. But if we are prevented from doing so, it will also be good to suffer for Zion.'[11]

The NKVD openly watched the house for several days before finally collecting their prey:

> Wherever you looked, there was suffering. A sea of suffering, deep and wide as the ocean . . . in days of mass catastrophe . . . it is then that man asks himself: Why do they suffer? . . . if you are unable to save; then nothing remains but the spectre of inequality in suffering; a fearsome phantom that almost takes away the very zest of living. Therefore, I am telling nothing but the truth when I say that when the fateful day came . . . my principal emotion was one of intense relief.[12]

Imprisonment and Interrogation

The story of Begin's imprisonment at the hand of the Stalin regime comes to us primarily through his book, which is extremely readable and wholly appealing at the human level. He had not the slightest understanding of Stalinism, he even told one of his interrogators that he 'simply [did] not recall Jabotinsky's ever having spoken to me about the Soviet Union', but he was curiously fascinated by the opportunity created by his change of fortune:

> I found a certain satisfaction in having the opportunity . . . of observing, at close quarters, from within, the methods, the secret workings and the rulers of the realms of the NKVD. I am telling the truth when I say that as I sat opposite my interrogator I felt I was, by inner recognition, a student observer, and a detainee only by some external decree. The power of curiosity![13]

He hastened to assure us that, had he been forced to serve his full sentence his curiosity most certainly would have vanished, if he himself did not simply die outright, but, while it lasted, the mood brought on by his strange circumstances and the intense ideological discussions with the NKVD, produced some absurd, but very human manifestations. One morning, after one such debate,

> I felt as if I was returning from a conference where I had participated in a heated discussion on the future of my people, and was now on my way back to my hotel room . . . the illusion was so realistic . . . I turned to the duty officer and asked, as if he were the hotel manager: 'Did anything come for me?' The officer gave me a peculiar look, and cursed.[14]

These interrogations were extraordinary, if grotesque. Begin was being accused of anti-Soviet activity but, in the end, he was actually being condemned for having been the head of Betar in Poland. He was a trained lawyer, and pointed out to his tormentors that Betar was completely legal in Poland, his activities had nothing to do with the Soviet Union, nor had he fled into the Soviet Union, but rather into Lithuania, and the only reason that he was in the hands of the NKVD was because the Soviet Union had seized that country. He not only had not engaged in anti-Soviet activities there, but was only too eager to leave: 'So how can I be punished for what I did in the past, within the law?' He was duly told that the laws against counter-revolution applied everywhere: 'Do you hear? *In the whole world.*'[15]

The interrogation–discussions were extensive, going on for many nights, and Begin was confronted with every conceivable charge that could be raised against Zionism. He is never very forthcoming about his pre-Palestinian career, understandably so, given Revisionism's now discredited ties with the anti-Semites of the time, but in dealing with these 'debates' he was compelled to more or less try to defend the pre-Holocaust policies of Zionism and Revisionism. Begin had asked for a Yiddish translator, who turned out to be an 'anti-Zionist Encyclopaedia', with the result that, at times, the sinister inquisition took on a serious dimension:

> My comrade has reminded me of the letter sent by that Herzl of yours to Plehve, the Czarist hangman Plehve, asking the Czarist government for support for the Zionist plan, and promising that Zionism would keep young Jews from joining the ranks of the revolution.

Begin had his ready answer for his interrogator:

> I would ask you to understand that Herzl felt that a catastrophe was about to befall his people, and we see how right he was. He was a statesman but he had no power behind him. He wanted to speed up the rescue of his people

and looked for help. What the interpreter said is not at all new. Herzl worked at a particular period. He went to the Sultan, too, to the German Kaiser as well, he even went to the Pope. He felt that the Jewish people could not wait. Jabotinsky also had this feeling. We all had it. May I give you an example, Citizen-Judge? A fire breaks out in a house, and you happen to pass by. What do you do? Naturally, you hasten to telephone the fire brigade, but if you hear the voice of a woman or a child screaming in the flames, will you wait for the fire brigade to get there? Of course you won't . . . That was exactly our situation . . . Could we wait? Let us suppose that the Revolution was a sort of fire brigade for the Jews who were being persecuted by anti-Semitism in Poland or Germany . . . but we could not wait for it to come.[16]

Quite regardless of the merits or follies of Begin's repartee, a dialogue with a Stalinist jailer could only have one outcome. Begin duly signed his confession, but, in so doing, he has provided an invaluable first-hand explanation as to why so many courageous figures, of many persuasions, had similarly confessed, before him, to crimes which they had never committed:

> The rulers in Moscow . . . had learnt that one of the decisive factors . . . is the 'blood-witness' of the persecuted . . . Because of this . . . Jewry was able to stand up to its persecutors . . . Christianity . . . became a world religion . . . Therefore, they will not permit any heroics, any martyrology on the public platform of the trial . . . The choice before the accused is: Either a trial with ideological annihilation, or physical destruction without a trial . . .
>
> inexperienced observers . . . come out with the idea that drugs are used . . . But even a layman may ask: . . . Are there lie drugs? . . . I was not tortured and I was not beaten . . . In the prison cells and in the Correctional Camp huts I came into personal contact with hundreds of other prisoners of that period. Not one of them had been beaten up or tortured . . . They signed . . . out of lack of sleep, out of an overwhelming desire to finish, to bring the mental torture to an end . . . I learnt from close up . . . what the decisive factors are . . . The first in importance is – isolation . . . if the fighter knows that his service is rendered worthless, that no one will hear what he says . . . then the thread between him and the ideal is likely to be severed . . . and his tortured soul asks: Who will know? . . . What point is there in my suffering . . . They will . . . answer: There is no point. When that happens the prisoner is doomed . . . to serve the ideal of his hangman.[17]

The Polish Exile Army

On 1 April 1941 Begin was sentenced, without trial, to eight years hard labour and in June he started the long journey to the Pechora-Lag, a

railway construction camp on the line to the now famous Vorkuta camp near the Barents Sea. While *en route*, word was passed through the train that the Nazis had invaded the Soviet Union. On 30 July the Soviets signed a pact with the Polish government-in-exile re-establishing relations and calling for the establishment of an exile army on Soviet soil. It is estimated that between a million and a million-and-a-half Polish citizens had fled into the Soviet-occupied eastern territories of the former Polish republic in the van of Hitler's oncoming armies. Approximately half of these had ultimately been imprisoned and, within a few weeks, found themselves free again.

Jewish Legion Proposals

In September and October 1941, two Revisionist ex-prisoners, Miron Sheskin, the former commander of the *Brit HaChayal* (Union of Soldiers), their veterans organization, and Mark Kahan, the editor of *Der Moment*, a Warsaw Yiddish paper, arrived at the staging area for the new exile army, in the Volga region, and began to propagandize the Polish military on behalf of their pre-war proposal to segregate the Jews into a Jewish legion. While the idea had a natural appeal for the anti-Semites running the local camp, the army's commander, General Wladyslaw Anders, though a former Tsarist officer and an intense anti-Semite, always understood that the proposition would be unacceptable to the Soviets and the British and Americans. However, some of the Polish military had pre-war connections with the separatist Revisionists and, whatever concerns their higher-ups might have had, they determined to try to set up such an outfit, which they hoped would be a practical substitute for a Jew-free army. Colonel Jan Galadyk, the commandant of the pre-war officers' academy, offered to head an initial battalion. After the war, Kahan presumed to describe the battalion as a prototype for his proposed Legion. However, a much more accurate and severe picture was portrayed by the unit's rabbi, an Agudist, Leon Rozen-Szeczakacz, in his own post-war book, *Cry in the Wilderness*.

On 7 October, at Totzkoye in the Samara Oblast, an officer called for the soldiers 'Of Moses' faith' to step forward. Most of those who did so suddenly found themselves to be civilians again and those who were not discharged were segregated from the rest of the army and ordered off to a new location at Koltubanka. Monstrous treatment began immediately. Most of the battalion were issued boots that were too small for them, meaning that they had to try to protect themselves with rags from the –40° winter. They would be left out in the open for days and the army would forget about feeding them. When Rozen-Szeczakacz, their chaplain, arrived, his first task was to start burying the dead, hundreds of miles from the nearest front.[18] Eventually word got to the Polish embassy as to their plight and the ambassador, concerned about adverse Allied reaction, saw to it that conditions improved. However, the larger Revisionist cum anti-Semite scheme for a full-blown Jewish Legion died in the

midst of the exile army's more overriding concern to leave the Soviet Union.

Departure of the Army-in-Exile

There was no possibility of the exile army co-operating with the Red Army. The government-in-exile had never reconciled itself to the Soviet annexation of the eastern territories, in spite of the fact that ethnic Poles were a distinct minority there. Nor could the Soviets openly tolerate the blatant anti-Semitism of the Polish army's commanding officer. Firmly convinced that Hitler would conquer the Soviet Union, Anders determined to get his soldiers out of the country via Iran, where they would link up with the British army. Stalin was willing to see them go: militarily they were far from crucial, and their withdrawal gave him a legitimate excuse to set up his own Polish force, under Communist control.

The anti-Semites tried to leave behind as many Jews as possible, and healthy youths were summarily rejected for service. Approximately 114,000 people were evacuated in 1942, with Jews making up only 5% of the soldiers and 7% of the civilians; this in spite of the fact that Jews made up about one-third of the Polish citizens then in the country and, before the anti-Semitic recruitment policy began, about 40% of the army's first enlistees had been Jewish. Naturally, Kahan and Sheskin had no trouble going out with the army, despite the discrimination.

White Nights scarcely touches on the Legion plot: 'Sheskin . . . told me . . . he had begun negotiations for the creation of a Jewish military unit within the Polish Army, but he did not succeed.'[19] When Begin tried to join the army he was rejected, the reason given being his bad heart and near-sightedness, both of which were quite real, whatever could additionally be said about the anti-Semitic motivation behind his rejection. He then wrote to the Chief of Staff, implying that if he was not taken in he would be re-arrested. Sheskin 'saw to it that the letter reached the Chief of Staff'.[20] He was called in for an interview with the General and a letter was sent to the draft board telling it to accept this Jew. Now the doctor found his 'heart and lungs, excellent! . . . you are actually shortsighted, but in the army you'll learn to shoot properly'.[21] Thus the later Prime Minister of Israel, through his movement's intimacy with the anti-Semites, left the Soviet Union, thereby ensuring that he would never see combat against the Nazi murderers of his mother and father.

It is one of the supreme ironies of World War II that the British routed the Polish army-in-exile, totally dominated by anti-Semites, to Palestine for further training. Their Zionist collaborator tells of his arrival in his 'homeland', in early May 1942:

> here was Transjordan. Our heritage . . . The military convoy stopped . . . I left the automobile, waded a little way into the grass, and drank in the odour of the fields of my homeland.[22]

Notes

1. Haber, *Menahem Begin*, p. 53; Gervasi, *The Life and Times of Menachem Begin*, p. 105.
2. Hyman Frank, 'The World of Menachem Begin', *Jewish Press*, 2 December 1977.
3. Eckman and Hirschler, *Menachem Begin*, p. 50.
4. Menachem Begin, *White Nights*, p. 79.
5. Chaim Lazar-Litai, *Muranowska Seven*, p. 44.
6. Begin, *White Nights*, pp. 84–5.
7. Ibid., p. 87.
8. 'Survivors Lead Protest Against Change In Observance of Yom Hashoa V'Hagvurah', *Martyrdom and Resistance*, October 1977, pp. 1, 3.
9. David Shipler, 'Israel Hardening Its Stand on Visits', *New York Times*, 3 March 1982, p. 7.
10. Begin, *White Nights*, p. 13.
11. Ibid., p. 28.
12. Ibid., p. 16.
13. Ibid., p. 21.
14. Ibid., pp. 73–4.
15. Ibid., p. 81.
16. Ibid., pp. 71–2.
17. Ibid., pp. 98–104.
18. Yisrael Gutman, 'Jews in General Anders' Army, in the Soviet Union', *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. XII, p. 226.
19. Begin, *White Nights*, p. 217.
20. Ibid., p. 218.
21. Ibid.
22. Begin, *The Revolt*, pp. 24–5.

11. The Revolt

The Split in the Irgun

When Begin arrived in Palestine in May 1942, he found his movement in total disarray. The split in the Irgun had not been healed. Avraham Stern and his followers, including Begin's intimate friends, Nathan Yalin-Mor and Israel Scheib (Eldad), who had been able to escape to Palestine before the Baltic corridor had been completely shut off, continued to fight the British.

On 12 February 1942, the British police finally captured – and murdered – Stern and, by the time Begin arrived in the country, it appeared that the Stern organization was finished although, in fact, it later reorganized under a leadership triumverate of Yalin-Mor, Scheib (Eldad), and Yitzhak Shamir, who, years later, was to become Begin's Foreign Minister, and then his successor as prime minister.

One may speculate as to whether Begin would have followed his two comrades into Stern's camp, had he arrived earlier. However, given his simultaneous loyalty to Jabotinsky and his immense admiration for Stern, the question is impossible to answer. At any rate, by 1942, he saw no reason to join the apparently extinguished Sternists, and, in September, he was asked to take over as Betar's Commissioner. In contrast to their Sternist rivals, the Revisionists were actively pro-British and had seen their strength diminished by military enlistments. The Irgun was effectively demobilized after its commander, David Raziel, had been killed in Iraq in May 1941, on a mission for the British against the revolutionary nationalist government of Rashid Ali el-Kilani, who had called in the Germans in a futile effort to rid his country of its British overlords.

Begin and the Irgun

Begin's Palestinian political career got off to a very slow start as it proved impossible for him to combine his Betar activities with his duties as an English-language translator for the Polish army, first in Haifa, then in Jerusalem for their town commander. Even in Palestine the exile army's leaders were still their old anti-Semitic selves, and many of their Jewish soldiers, particularly amongst the Zionists, had deserted in disgust.

Begin, however, saw himself bound by his honour as a Betari not to betray his military oath, and would not desert.

In November 1942 both the WZO leadership and the Allies finally acknowledged that the Nazis were systematically exterminating European Jewry, and a group of Irgun activists in the US, upon hearing the confirmation of the catastrophe, had begun to mobilize American public opinion for an Allied rescue effort.[1] Inspired by their new-found ability to mobilize a significant element amongst American Jewry, they sent one of their number back to Palestine to revive the Irgun and start a revolt, utilizing Britain's growing unpopularity, both in Palestine and the Diaspora, due to its unwillingness to do anything for the Jews in occupied Europe. Such a campaign required a new Irgun leader, with primarily political talents, which the then commander, Yaakov Meridor, certainly did not have. The boy orator of the Polish Betar, who had no prior conspiratorial experience, nor military training, was the preferred successor. Arye Ben-Eliazer, the emissary from America, came to the Poles with a proposition. He asked that Begin and four other Jews be sent to the US to rally support for their rescue campaign and an 'independent', i.e. an anti-Communist, post-war Poland. The commandant agreed, and discharged Begin. The proposal had been a ruse, but now, in December 1943, Begin was technically released from his oath, and free to assume the Irgun command.

The Irgun Revolt

On the morning of 1 February 1944, the public woke up to find a proclamation, 'To the Hebrew Nation in Zion', posted up on walls all over Jewish Palestine. The manifesto catalogued the manifold sins of the Allies, the British and the Arabs against the Jews of Holocaust Europe:

> The British . . . declared that there is no possibility of rescue operations in that they will 'hamper the achievement of victory' . . . The White Paper remains valid . . . despite the treason of the Arabs and the loyalty of the Jews . . . and despite the fact that, after the eradication of Hitlerism, there is no future for Jews among the nations of Europe, eaten up as they are by their hatred of Israel . . . God of Israel, God of hosts, be our help. There is no retreat. Liberty or death![2]

There was a surreal quality to the Irgun's revolt. The entire force consisted of no more than a few dozen (at times less than two dozen) full-time fighters, and no more than a few hundred part-time supporters. Additionally, Begin understood that there was a real war on and that neither Jewish nor world opinion would have any sympathy for their efforts if they interfered with the final crushing of Nazism. Accordingly, the Irgun never attacked British military installations during the war,

confining its military efforts to police stations and governmental offices. To minimize British casualties, advance warnings were given wherever possible so that civilians could be evacuated.

The revolt was immensely unpopular within the Yishuv. From the beginning, the Revisionist Party's political structure had opposed the venture, and Begin had to sever the Irgun's ties to them. On 6 November 1944, the Stern Gang assassinated Lord Moyne, the British High Commissioner for the Middle East, in Cairo. The WZO leadership, which had been told by Churchill that he would propose a post-war Zionist state, now saw their hopes for such largess vanish in the wake of the killing of Churchill's personal friend, and Ben-Gurion determined on a campaign of co-operation with the British against the separatist movements. The labourites focused most of their attention on the Irgun, reasoning that the Sternists were incapable of committing more than an occasional outrage, whereas the much stronger Irgunists could be counted on to repeatedly attack British installations, each time arousing British and world hostility to the Zionist cause. The Haganah declared an open 'Saison' on the Beginites.

Begin had financed the revolt, amongst other ways, by extorting money from Zionist businessmen, and organizing bogus robberies of Irgun supporters in the diamond industry, with the dealers getting their cash back from the insurance companies.[3] That soon came to a halt as the Haganah began to systematically kidnap known Irgunists. For the first time, torture – now a standard feature of the Zionist kit – was introduced into Palestinian politics. Begin makes the accusation in his *Revolt*:

> The treatment of those kidnapped by the Haganah was grim . . . there were cases of maltreatment at the hands of their fellow-Jewish captors . . . True, we did not yet know of the use of 'third degree', but even the 'first degree' was enough to infuriate us.[4]

The accusation has been substantiated by the well-known Israeli historian, Yehuda Bauer, in his *From Diplomacy to Resistance*:

> Many . . . members . . . were interrogated and, in certain cases, even punished . . . The Haganah sought to break their power of resistance by this affront to them. According to the statements of Saison operatives, the prisoners' holding strength against Jewish interrogators – in contrast to their resistance to the English – was not great. The vast majority of those questioned supplied the Haganah with the needed facts.[5]

Under orders from Begin, the Irgunists did not retaliate against the Haganah. Begin was thinking ahead; he correctly reckoned that, after the war, the Haganah would itself rise up against the British, and he did not want to put blood between the two movements who, he knew, would have to co-operate in the future if there was ever to be a Zionist state.

However, the combined weight of the British and the Haganah was overwhelming and the Irgun's campaign became progressively weaker until the war ended in Europe, in May 1945, when the Irgun warned the public that it would again be attacking governmental buildings.

The Revolt in Retrospect

Given its self-imposed strictures, was there any rationality behind the Irgun's wartime rebellion? The answer can only be a clear no. The British refusal to rescue European Jewry was the immediate excuse given in their initial proclamation but, it can be stated, with certainty, that the Irgun's private war with Britain rescued no Jews. In fact it diverted attention from the Jews of Europe and permitted the WZO apparatus, in both Palestine and the US, as well as the British, to point a finger at the Irgun as crazy terrorists, thereby distracting the public from the reality that the Allies and the WZO were, each for their different reasons, indifferent to rescue.[6] At this late remove we can only speculate, but had the Irgun mobilized the Jews of Palestine for mass demonstrations calling for rescue, in conjunction with the work done in this regard by their American-based colleagues, it is possible that they could have played an important role in compelling the Allies to take action. In the event, Begin's revolt did absolutely nothing to help the Jews in Europe in their hour of desperate need. In reality, the Holocaust had only been a handy rationale for a revolt and Begin, who had shouted the loudest in the pre-war period for the fantastic scheme to invade Palestine with the aid of the Polish anti-Semites, obliquely admits as much in his book:

> Vladimir Jabotinsky . . . said [everyone] had read the Bible and knew that once we Jews started *coming back* to Eretz Yisrael, our aim must be clear: that Eretz Yisrael should be ours again . . . There is no doubt that even had there been no extermination . . . a Jewish revolt in one form or another, would have been launched.[7]

Certainly it was *post-war* considerations that motivated the policy of non-retaliation during the Saison. Begin writes that they

> were moved by faith, a profound faith that believed the day was not far distant when all the armed camps in Israel would stand and fight shoulder to shoulder.[8]

He knew then, and he knew when he penned these words, years later, after the war, that the Haganah and the Irgun could only be thought of as military allies after the end of the Holocaust.

Notes

1. Lenni Brenner, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators*, pp. 228–51.
2. Haber, *Menahem Begin* (uncorrected proof), pp. 105–6.
3. Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, p. 325.
4. Begin, *The Revolt*, pp. 147–8.
5. Bauer, p. 325.
6. Brenner, op. cit.
7. Begin, p. 39.
8. Ibid., p. 152.

12. The Revolt: Part 2

The end of the war in Europe changed the topography of both Zionist and world politics, and the Irgun was able to escape from its total isolation. Although the WZO did not revolt during the war, its leaders understood that they now had to make their move to get their state. The Labour Zionists were jubilant when their socialist colleagues of the British Labour Party swept into power in that country's first post-war election. In 1944, the British Labour Party had not only called for the creation of a Jewish state, but had proposed that 'the Arabs be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in.'[1] However, the Labour Zionists were speedily reminded of the reality of the British Labour Party: it rested on the working class, they were minimalist and passive, concerned with obtaining reforms for themselves; they scarcely cared what their leaders did in the colonies. Clement Attlee, Ernest Bevin and company were totally committed to maintaining as much of the Empire as Britain, in its much weakened post-war circumstances, could afford to hold. They had no conflict with the colonial bureaucracy's pre-war decision that further patronage of Zionism could only cause problems for Britain throughout the Middle East, and the vote-catching resolutions became dead letters.

The Resistance Movement

Ben-Gurion and the Haganah became convinced that they would have to drive the British out if they were ever going to get their state. That required unity within the ranks of Zionism and they proposed a joint military campaign to the Irgun and Stern Gang who, until the autumn of 1945, they had solemnly proclaimed to be terrorists, fascists and madmen. And Begin, who, during the Saison, had put up wall posters comparing them to 'Quisling and Laval', eagerly accepted.[2]

Although the Haganah had wanted the Irgunists to directly enter its ranks, Begin would not hear of it. He was as fanatically committed to an Israel on both sides of the Jordan as ever, and he knew it was inevitable that, at some point, the mainline Zionist leadership would 'betray' Zionism, and accept far less than his maximalist Revisionist vision. But, given

the vast disproportion in the size of the three components of the alliance – the Haganah had 40,000 members, the Irgun 1,500, the Stern Gang a mere 300 – he did accept a dominant position for the Haganah in the new Tnuat HaMeri or Resistance Movement. Both the Irgun and the Sternists agreed to permit the Haganah to determine which targets the dissidents would be allowed to attack. The military *entente* was finalized in November 1945 and soon the Irgun had sunk three patrol boats used to stop illegal immigration, the Haganah cut the railways at no less than 186 places, and the Stern Gang attacked the refinery at Haifa. The list of targets mounted impressively: police stations, radio transmitters, military airports, railway installations were hit, and the British were forced to bring in additional troops. These eventually numbered an incredible 105,000 to control a Zionist population of approximately 600,000. The reinforcements changed nothing; increasingly the administration went on the defensive, retreating into total isolation from the society around them, hiding in barbed-wire and sandbag ghettoes known as 'Bevingrads'. Unless drastic measures were immediately taken, all would be lost.

The King David Hotel Incident and the End of the Entente

On Saturday 29 June 1946, all Jewish population centres were placed under curfew, and the British army struck everywhere. Thousands of suspects were interned and many of the leaders of the Jewish Agency, including Moshe Shertok (Sharett), its Political Secretary, were imprisoned. However, Weizmann was not detained, and the Haganah's commander, Moshe Sneh, escaped the dragnet, going to Paris, where he joined up with Ben-Gurion who was there on diplomatic business. The Irgun had already proposed that the King David Hotel, British headquarters, be hit, and now the Haganah gave its approval, seeing it as fitting retaliation for the ransacking of the Jewish Agency's headquarters. The story of the attack is well-known: the Irgun placed a mine in the basement, duly phoned in three warnings that it would go off in half an hour, for some reason the warning was ignored, and the massive bomb killed over a hundred people, including many civilian employees, Arab, British and Jewish. The Jewish Agency rushed to denounce the attack, claiming that the Irgun had violated its specifications as to when the bomb should be set, and the military united front came to an end.

The Displaced Persons and US Support for Zionism

The King David incident can only be called a precipitating cause for the split, which would have come about in any case. The 'black sabbath' had shaken the WZO leaders' confidence in their ability to take on Britain head-on, nor did they now see the need to do so. They had always been pro-imperialist, always trying to demonstrate that a policy of relying on the 'loyal Jewish Ulster' was in Britain's interest. Now they were definitely

trying to jump over into the American orbit, but the US had no interest in supporting revolts, and certainly not in the British Empire, which Washington saw as an essential ally in the cold war. Ben-Gurion had come to see the 'Displaced Persons' in Germany as the decisive factor in winning American support for a Zionist state, and he called off the Haganah's campaign to directly overthrow the regime in Palestine and focused all of its efforts into building a massive illegal immigration campaign.

In October 1945 Ben-Gurion had travelled to Germany, visited several DP camps, and met Eisenhower, asking that Jews from Eastern Europe be admitted into the American zone. He explained his strategy to his colleagues in Palestine, in a 21 November memo:

> If we can succeed in concentrating a quarter million Jews in the American Zone, it will increase the American pressure. Not because of the financial aspects of the problem – that does not matter to them – but because they see no future for these people outside Eretz-Yisrael.[3]

It was not the German-Jewish survivors of the Holocaust that were to be decisive. Few of these had survived their deportation to the East, the vast majority of those who had gone into exile in the West had no desire to return – nor to go to Palestine – and those who did return were completely safe in a Germany militarily dominated by the Allies. It was the Polish situation that developed into Zionism's salvation. Approximately 80,000 Jews had survived in the country itself and another 175,000 returned from the Soviet Union in 1946. But the new Communist regime was politically isolated from the masses and was too weak to adequately defend the Jews from their reactionary opponents, who identified them with the Communists. Thus, 351 Jews were murdered between November 1944 and October 1945, and the pogroms continued into 1946, culminating in a savage massacre in Kielce on 4 July 1946, with the slaughter of 42 Jews. Kielce terrified the remaining Jews and 100,000 of them fled Poland, and several other Eastern European countries, in the next three months. The Zionist scholar, Yehuda Bauer, concedes that, if given an equal chance to choose between the US or Palestine, 50% would have opted for the US. However, the Zionist leadership knew that US politicians had no desire to open its gates to Jewish refugees. In fact, according to the pro-Zionist scholar Samuel Halperin, one of the more important considerations that pushed the American Jewish bourgeoisie, until then opposed to Zionism, into the pro-Zionist camp was their fear that, if the DPs came to the US in any significant numbers, it would mean 'importing more anti-Semitism'. Behind the scenes, the Joint Distribution Committee, their overseas philanthropic arm, cynically discussed the advantages of a determined push for emigration to Palestine which, it was explained, would make for 'good Jewish-Christian relations in America'.[4]

Certainly the Zionist leadership had no desire to see America let in

potential emigrants to their would-be state and Bauer tells us candidly that:

> the Zionist leadership feared that the masses concentrated in the displaced persons' camps in Germany and Austria would seek a way of reaching countries overseas rather than waiting until the gates of Palestine were opened to them.[5]

Begin denounced the disbandment of the revolt, terming it a 'political and spiritual surrender' which brought 'dishonour' to the Haganah.[6] He was far from oblivious to the importance of the DPs in terms of pressurizing American opinion, but he saw that there were many other explosive situations competing for the world's attention. While direct attacks on the British hit the front pages throughout the world, would an illegal immigration campaign, alone, do likewise when even fierce battles of the Greek civil war were barely covered?

Impact of the Irgun Revolt

From 23 August 1946 until the UN partition in November 1947, the dissidents were alone in their direct struggle against the regime. In his memoir, *The Revolt*, Begin, naturally enough, makes a powerful case to prove that it was their continuation of the revolt that ultimately led to the British withdrawal, even if not the conquest of the entire country (which, in his mind, also includes Jordan), and even if not to their coming to power. And, in truth, there can be no doubt that their campaigns did play a crucial role in forcing the British out. Some years later, the last commandant of the Palestine Police said that three incidents compelled his government to rethink its determination to stay on, and all were part of the continued Irgun campaign: the flogging of British soldiers; followed by the hanging of more soldiers, both in retaliation for British floggings and hangings, and the storming of the fortress at Acre.

Late in 1946, two 17-year-old Irgunists were sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, scarcely a sentence that would intimidate anyone, since few could envision Britain still being in Palestine for 15 years. But they were also to be given 18 lashes each. The Irgun's response was immediate: they announced that if the sentence were carried out, they would retaliate by whipping British soldiers. Sure enough, on 27 December 1946, the Labour imperialists duly whipped one of the unruly colonials and, on 29 December, a major and three NCOs were promptly given the same 18 lashes. To make sure the British got the point, the Irgun announced that if the second youth were caned they would kill in retaliation. The times had changed, Jews were not ordinary wogs, and Britain was forced to make a humiliating retreat and call off the second flogging.

Whipping being a universally despised weapon of tyranny, Begin

suddenly found himself a world hero. But the propaganda victory was only another act in the unfolding tragedy. Four Irgun youths, searching for soldiers to serve as retaliatory victims, had been caught with whips. One was beaten so badly that he died, and the other three were sentenced to death, joining another Irgunist already so sentenced. At Acre, before dawn on 16 April 1947, the four went to their deaths, bravely singing the Zionist anthem. Before vengeance could be wreaked, other prisoners were liberated on 4 May 1947, in a stunning attack on the fortress at Acre. Breaching walls that had withstood Napoleon, in an all-Arab city, the escape ranks, despite unforeseeable casualties and its further tragic denouement, as an incredibly heroic achievement. But two Irgunists were captured, savagely beaten and sentenced to death. As Begin says, the Irgun had neither whips nor gallows in its arsenal, such as were in Labour imperialism's armoury; their use by the Irgun must be laid to British madness, but two sergeants were hung, on 30 July, the day after the Irgunists went to their deaths. The dramatic retaliation, against so majestic an enemy as the British Empire, could not but have a profound impact, both on British and world opinion. Colonel Archer-Cust, assistant to the Chief-Secretary of the Mandatory, openly declared in 1949 that 'the hanging of the two British sergeants did more than anything to get us out'.[7]

Partition

If Britain's compulsive imperialist cruelty and the Irgun's exploits projected Begin into the centre of the world stage, nevertheless the Irgun's activities must still be seen within the larger context. The Haganah ran several immigrant ships, the *Exodus Europe 1947*, being only the most famous, to Palestine and again pictures of Jews behind barbed wire, this time in Cyprus, filled the papers. Much of the world became sympathetic to Zionism, a Jewish state began to be seen as the 'silver lining', certainly inadequate compensation for the slaughter of six million Jews, but only justice. American Jewish pressure on President Truman became massive. While the State Department desperately tried to impress him with the need for cold war solidarity, and warned of potential consequences for American interests in the Arab world, the domestic politicians made it equally clear that he stood no chance of getting contributions from rich Jews towards the forthcoming electoral campaign if he opposed the creation of an Israeli state. This was a crucial consideration for the Democrats, who have always been dependent for many of their largest donations on Jewish capitalists, who traditionally identified with the Democrats as the immigrants' party. US public opinion would not tolerate, in Palestine, against Jews, the brutal methods the British Empire never hesitated to use against the lesser breeds. Britain's diplomatic position became impossible.

A tripartite conference, of representatives of the Arab Higher Committee, the Jewish Agency, and the British, met in London on 10 January 1947, and inevitably failed, with Bevin announcing at a press conference on 14 February that Britain would bring the Palestine question to the UN, in September. Begin understood that the British were proposing a September date as part of a stall and, on 1 March, the Irgun successfully carried out ten simultaneous attacks on British military installations, and the British imposed martial law. When the Commons met on 3 March, Churchill and others pressed for more immediate UN action, and the UN agreed to hold a special session on 28 April.

The Soviet and US Positions

It was during the special session that Andre Gromyko made his notorious speech reversing the Soviet Union's traditional opposition to a Zionist state. Stalin had concluded that the Arab states were too reactionary to wage a serious struggle against the imperialists, and he decided that the only way to start the process of propelling the British out of the region was to have the Zionists start by pushing them out of Palestine.

The Soviet shift, coming on top of the previous factors, put the Democrats on the spot. The American CP had decided to back Henry Wallace against Truman in the 1948 elections. Not to come out for a Zionist state would now leave them exposed to their 'left' flank, while the Republicans were certain to demagogically attack them as well. The administration decided on a sly manoeuvre: they would pretend to be for a UN partition, expecting that the Zionists would be unable to obtain the necessary two-thirds vote, and then Washington and the British would be able to work out a suitable compromise. Loy Henderson, the State Department's Director of Near Eastern Affairs, explained the Department's thinking in a secret memo, dated 22 October 1947:

> If we carry the flag we shall inescapably be saddled with the major if not sole responsibility for administration and enforcement which, we gather, neither the Congress nor the American people are willing to undertake . . . On the assumption that we are going to follow our present policy of supporting partition without waving the flag, we agree that partition will probably fail of a two-thirds vote . . . if partition fails, we do not see that the US or any other country which has supported it would be inhibited from retreating to some compromise plan.[8]

The UN Vote

With the US and the USSR now both lined up, each for its own unprincipled reasons, behind the Zionists, a UN special commission inevitably came out for partition and, by 29 November, the Zionists were, through intense lobbying, able to obtain the needed votes. Although the State Department later tried to call off partition on the grounds that instead of stopping violence it provoked it, the pressure of the domestic politicians

concerned for the Jewish vote proved decisive, and, in the end, Truman gave the go ahead for the creation of the Zionist state.

To the rest of the world, partition looked like a Zionist victory; to Begin it was only a step towards victory. It galvanized Zionism, but an Israel without a Jerusalem is no Zionist state. The WZO leadership had given away most of the biblical patrimony, it was up to the Irgun to make sure that they did not retreat further and to win more of the homeland.

Arab Reaction

The Palestinians had been remarkably quiet throughout the 1940s in the wake of their defeat in the 1936 revolt. The Mufti had been deeply involved in the Iraqi revolt and had fled to the German Embassy in Teheran. After Nazi agents spirited him out in the aftermath of the British-Soviet occupation of Iran, he embarked on a career of intense collaboration, recruiting Arabs, and later Yugoslav and Soviet Muslims, for the Germans. At the war's end he tried to take asylum in Switzerland, but was deported to France. Tito listed him as a war criminal but never demanded extradition; the French, anti-British because of Britain's support for the Syrians, and aware of his popularity in the Arab world, kept him under house arrest. When an American journalist focused attention on his story in June 1946, he had no difficulty fleeing to Cairo, where the Arab Higher Committee, in conjunction with the Arab League, gave him the leadership of the Palestinian movement, as if nothing had occurred in the intervening years. The Jews in Palestine all knew he had co-operated with Hitler and his return to the Middle East only acted to solidify most of them behind the Zionists. The hopeless reactionary did nothing to mobilize the Palestinian masses, who remained passive and fearful in the face of the enormous energy displayed by the Zionists. All potential of mass mobilization vanished when Stalin embraced Zionism; this split the local Communists on ethnic lines and utterly demoralized the Arab faction. Only in mid-September did the Arab League begin to talk of war, and only after the UN vote did the Arab Higher Committee call for a three-day Palestinian general strike.

Militarily, the Arabs were never any match for the Zionists, who had greatly profited from their wartime experience in the British army, while far fewer Palestinians had joined up, and fewer still of the educated. With the exception of the Jordanian Legion, which had stayed loyal to Britain out of professionalism, all the other Arab units in the British sphere had rebelled and been humiliated by the British, and had not advanced beyond their pre-war 'palace guard' level. But Abdullah of Jordan was a secret traitor, parleying almost to the end with the WZO to partition the country and freeze out the Mufti. Led by a discredited fanatic, in tandem with several divided, militarily impotent and politically reactionary regimes; confronted with an ascending Zionist movement backed, however reluctantly, by both Moscow and Washington, the fate of the Palestinians was sealed.

'Smite Them Hip and Thigh': Dir Yassin

If, in confronting the British, Begin was like unto his mentor's knightly Samson, in confronting the Palestinians he was a veritable Joshua, eager to put these latter-day Canaanites to the sword, warning them in December: 'the hand of murderers we shall cut off without mercy'.[9] He told a foreign guest that 'in modern war it was not numbers that decided the issue but brains and morale. As for brains, it was hardly necessary for me to elaborate.' Should they attack, 'we would smite them hip and thigh'.[10] With the prophet Menachem, words are followed by deeds and, as of old, bombs were placed in Arab cafes, in the marketplace in Haifa, and before the Damascus Gate in the Holy City.[11]

The certainty of war drew the Haganah and the Irgun together, and on 8 March 1948 they came to an agreement on operations. Again the Haganah would approve the Irgun's plans, which would be carried out by the dissidents. The Irgun and Sternists received permission to seize the village of Dir Yassin, on the western outskirts of Jerusalem; this they did on 9 April 1948. Begin was not there; not having been properly militarily trained, he was never allowed to play a combat role. But, as the Irgun's commandant, he has always assumed full responsibility for their behaviour that night:

> At that village, whose name was publicized throughout the world, both sides suffered heavy casualties. We had four killed and nearly forty wounded. The number of casualties was nearly forty per cent of the total number of the attackers. The Arab troops suffered casualties three times as heavy.[12]

The Irgun's communique after the battle gave its casualties as four dead and 32 wounded, three seriously; 254 villagers were butchered there that night. Irgun apologists claim that they had brought along a truck with a loudspeaker, to tell the civilians there to flee, but that, alas, it fell into an Arab defence ditch. Begin, in his *Revolt*, sadly relates that:

> a few did not leave their stone houses – perhaps because of the confusion . . . Our men were compelled to fight for every house; to overcome the enemy they used large numbers of hand-grenades. And the civilians who had disregarded our warnings, suffered inevitable casualties.[13]

Despite the well-known history of the Irgun's prior market bombs, Begin insists that:

> The education which we gave our soldiers throughout the years of revolt was based on the observance of the traditional laws of war. We never broke them unless the enemy first did so and thus forced us, in accordance with the accepted custom of war, to apply reprisals.[14]

The realities of Dir Yassin are well understood. There was a Haganah witness, Col. Meir Pa'el who, upon retirement from the Israeli army in 1972, finally chose to come forth with a public account of the event:

> In the exchange that followed four men were killed and a dozen were wounded . . . by noon time the battle was over and the shooting had ceased. Although there was a calm, the village had not yet surrendered. The Irgun and Lehi men came out of hiding and began to 'clean' the houses. They shot whoever they saw, women and children included, the commanders did not try to stop the massacre . . . I pleaded with the commander to order his men to cease fire, but to no avail. In the meantime, 25 Arabs had been loaded on a truck and driven through Mahne-Yehuda and Zichron Yosef (like prisoners in a Roman 'March of Triumph'). At the end of the drive, they were taken to the quarry between Deir-Yassin and Givat-Shaul, and murdered in cold blood . . . The commanders also declined when asked to take their men and bury the 254 Arab bodies. This unpleasant task was performed by two Gadna units brought to the village from Jerusalem.[15]

Far from being apologetic about Dir Yassin, Irgun veterans now return to the scene of their infamous crime to commemorate their activities there. However, in 1982, Professor Zvi Ankori, who had commanded the Haganah force that later occupied the village, asked to say a few words at the gathering:

> 'I went into 6–7 houses' said Ankori. 'I saw cut off genitalia and women's crushed stomachs. According to the shooting signs on the bodies, it was direct murder' . . . 'What,' asked one of them, 'you had time to lift the dresses and seek for genitalia?' 'I won't argue,' said Ankori, 'I just thought that the young generation of today should hear what I had to say.'[16]

There can be no doubt that Dir Yassin was a monstrous atrocity. Jacques de Reynier, the Red Cross representative in Palestine, visited the village immediately after the incident and met the Irgun commandant, who told him: 'If I found any bodies, I could take them, but there were certainly no wounded. This account made my blood run cold.'[17] The two Zionist Chief Rabbis of Palestine, I. H. Herzog and R. Z. Uziel, issued a joint statement condemning the murders, calling upon the perpetrators to realize the depths of 'the shame which they have inflicted upon the Yishuv to whom their acts are utter abomination'.[18] The Jewish Agency expressed its 'horror and disgust at the barbarous manner' in which the taking of the village was carried out.[19]

Begin, of course, had his answer to the universal condemnation of Dir Yassin. The world – as per usual – was lying about the Irgun:

> Arab headquarters at Ramallah broadcast a crude atrocity story, alleging a massacre by Irgun troops of women and children in the village. Certain

> Jewish officials, fearing the Irgun men as political rivals, seized upon this Arab *greuel* propaganda to smear the Irgun. An eminent Rabbi was induced to reprimand the Irgun before he had time to sift the truth. Out of evil, however, good came. This Arab propaganda spread a legend of terror amongst Arabs and Arab troops, who were seized with panic at the mention of Irgun soldiers. The legend was worth half a dozen battalions to the forces of Israel.[20]

Indeed, out of evil, 'good' did come: in the Hebrew version of the *Revolt* we are further told that:

> Arabs throughout the country, induced to believe wild tales of 'Irgun butchery', were seized with limitless panic and started to flee for their lives. This mass flight soon developed into a maddened, uncontrollable stampede. Of the about 800,000 Arabs who lived on the present territory of the State of Israel, only some 165,000 are still there. The political and economic significance of this development can hardly be overestimated.[21]

The Irgun Attack on Jaffa

For all the denunciations, the Haganah could hardly think of punishing the Irgun, whom it still needed in the war against the Arabs. Fresh from Dir Yassin, the Irgun looked for new prey, and Begin turned to Jaffa, which, according to the utopian UN partition, was to become part of the Arab state, but as an enclave entirely within the borders of Israel. Pressed on many sides by Arab military forces, the Haganah set a low priority to taking the hopelessly surrounded city of 70,000, but Begin had decided on a 'strategy of conquest' and on the night of 25 April 1948 the Irgun struck – with two three-inch mortars pouring down hundreds of shells on the beleaguered town. It was to be their largest operation as an independent force and Begin, well aware that the Haganah would never allow it, simply neglected to tell them of the plan. By all pro-Irgun accounts, the Arabs defended themselves with great determination but had nothing to match the mortars, and slowly they began to crack. The Irgun could not take the entire city – British armour would not let them through – but, with Dir Yassin fresh in everyone's mind, the Palestinians abandoned their homes and fled in tens of thousands. Said Begin:

> There appear to have been two causes for this epidemic flight. One was the name of their attackers and the repute which propaganda had bestowed on them . . . The second factor was the weight of our bombardment . . . Yigal Yadin, Operations Officer of the Haganah, told me afterwards that we had not been sufficiently economical with our precious shells.[22]

Begin omitted to tell his readers of the shameful aftermath of the assault. In his *Seven Fallen Pillars*, Jon Kimche, a well-known pro-Zionist historian, was quite blunt:

> For the first time . . . a Jewish force commenced to loot in wholesale fashion . . . Everything that was moveable was carried from Jaffa . . . What could not be taken away was smashed . . . looting Arab homes and shops was soon explained away and later justified as ministering to the needs of Jewish evacuees who lost their homes and their all as a result of the four months of attacks from Jaffa.

Kimche cannot be accused of factional malice; he made the same accusation against the Haganah:

> Before long the rest of the Jewish soldiers of the Haganah and the Palmach should join in the orgy of looting and wanton destruction which hangs like a black pall over almost all of the Jewish military successes.[23]

Proclamation of the State of Israel

On 15 May 1948 the Israeli state was duly proclaimed and Begin came out of the underground to make his first radio speech:

> The Hebrew revolt of 1944–48 has been blessed with success . . . the foundation has been laid – but only the foundation . . . for the return of the whole People of Israel to its homeland, for the restoration of the whole Land of Israel to its God-covenanted owners . . . Our God-given country is a unity. The attempt to dissect it is not only a crime but blasphemy and an abortion. Whoever does not recognize our natural right to our entire homeland, does not recognize our right to any part of it . . . O God of Israel, keep Thy soldiers and bless their sword which gives a new birth to the covenant that Thou has sealed with Thy beloved people and Thy chosen land. Forward to the battleground! Forward to victory![24]

The Altalena Affair

The creation of the Israeli state did not quite end the Irgun's military history. On that same night Begin had a meeting with the new Deputy Minister of Defence to tell him that the Irgun abroad had brought a 4,000-ton former tank transport, the *Altalena*, to France. He did not tell them that it was to pick up weapons secretly provided by the French government, piqued at Britain's role in pushing France out of the Levant. He proposed that the IDF contribute $250,000 for weapons purchases. Two days later the government refused the proposition, coming as it did from the despised Irgun. On 31 May the Israeli Defence Forces were established and the next day the Irgun signed an agreement to merge into the IDF over a period of weeks. They could enter as units. Because Israel did not then claim Jerusalem as part of its territory, both the Haganah and the Irgun continued on there as separate organizations. On 2 June Israel and the Arabs signed a truce, scheduled to take effect on 11 June,

prohibiting the introduction of additional troops or arms into the country. That day the *Altalena* left France with 900 Irgun recruits and thousands of weapons.

Begin claims that he did not know the ship had left but, not wanting to take responsibility for breaking the truce, he immediately tried to recall it to port. He insists that the IDF then agreed to allow the vessel to carry on. The Irgun had proposed that 80% of the weapons go to the former Irgun units going into the IDF, and 20% to the still independent unit in Jerusalem. Revisionist sources claim that they later conceded the 80% to the IDF to do with as it saw fit, but that the 20% were still to go 'to Jerusalem'.

The ship had been told to go directly to Tel Aviv. However, with the truce now in effect, the IDF had the Irgun radio new orders for it to proceed to Kfar Vitkin, a Labour Zionist stronghold further up the coast and away from the eyes of any UN observers. There, the weapons would be unloaded and put in government custody. However, Ben-Gurion would not hear of any proposition to arm a rival ideological army, and Begin was notified that the government would assume no responsibility for the unloading of the arms.

The *Altalena* arrived on 20 June; 850 men were disembarked and the remaining 50 men, with a contingent of awaiting Irgunists, including Begin, started to unload the cargo. The next day the IDF presented a ten-minute ultimatum to Begin: he must immediately turn over the weapons or the government would use force. Ten minutes turned out to be several hours, during which the Irgun strategists decided to leave a small party to guard the already unloaded cargo on the shore, while the *Altalena* moved down to Tel Aviv where the Irgun had its supporters and, they reasoned, Ben-Gurion would be less likely to start what would amount to a civil war.

When the army finally opened fire, Begin was still ashore and his first reaction was that he, who had never been under fire during the fight against the British or the Arabs, could not leave his men under fire. His officers would not hear of this, and dragged him aboard the boat.[25] Six Irgunists and two IDF soldiers were killed in the ensuing battle on the beach while the ship steamed toward Tel Aviv. It arrived there during the night, ran aground 700 yards off the shore and was immediately greeted by small arms fire. The next morning the captain hoisted a white flag, but Begin soon started shouting through a bullhorn for the people to help them bring the weapons to the beach. This was too much for the IDF and it started shelling the boat in earnest. Several people on board were killed, amongst them Avraham Stavsky, the Brit HaBiryonim fanatic who had cheated the hangman in 1934 for his part in the assassination of Chaim Arlosoroff, and who was now the nominal owner of the *Altalena*. Eventually a shell hit the ship's hold and the ammunition below decks began to explode. The captain gave the order to abandon ship, but Begin refused to surrender. The captain, naturally enough, was in no mood for

heroics and Begin was pinned down on the deck, with a crewman's knee resting on his back.[26] When everyone else had abandoned ship, the captain had two crewmen throw the future Prime Minister of Israel over the side.[27] Fourteen Irgunists had been killed in the one-sided battle.

Facing Arab armies poised on several fronts, the government, for all its having accused the Irgun of trying to arm itself for a coup, chose not to press the Irgun to the wall. That night Begin broadcast a distraught version of the episode, denying the charge, claiming that they were only trying to bring in needed arms, and finally bursting into tears. It was obviously imperative to wind down the organization with dignity and he went to Jerusalem to formally hand over its banner to the local commander. On 17 September the Stern Gang assassinated Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN Special Mediator, and Begin rushed to declare that there was no connection between the Jerusalem Irgun and the assassins. Nevertheless, three days later the government issued an ultimatum insisting on the dissolution of the Jerusalem unit; the next day, Shmuel Katz, the last Irgun commander, called a press conference to herald its demise.

The Freedom Party – Tnuat Ha Herut

In October Begin announced a new party, the *Tnuat Ha Herut* (Freedom Movement), to continue their struggle against both the Arabs and the Labour Zionists. Its platform was straight Revisionism, its central plank a declaration that the Hebrew homeland lay on both sides of the Jordan. The pro-Fascist tradition was maintained via the party paper, *Herut*, which had amongst its regular contributors Abba Achimeir, Uri Zvi Greenberg and Wolfgang von Weisl, all of them openly pro-Mussolini in the 1930s.

In November, Begin arrived in America for what he hoped would be a triumphal fund-raising tour but, in most respects, the trip turned out disastrously. He dutifully 'reported' to Jabotinsky, in his grave in Long Island, that a Jewish state had been created, and he was welcomed by New York's mayor, William O'Dwyer. At a banquet in his honour at the Waldorf Astoria, Begin had been scheduled to speak for 45 minutes, and had been urged to talk about the future. However, he went on for some two-and-a-half hours, until well past midnight, speaking of the glories of the Irgun's struggle and focusing on the whipping of the British soldiers. In the words of Shmuel Merlin, the first Secretary-General of the new party, 'it seemed like two and a half days'.[28]

On 4 December the *New York Times* published a letter signed by Hannah Arendt, Albert Einstein, Sidney Hook and Seymour Melmen, among others. With Einstein's name attached to it, the critique attracted enormous attention. Although it was written from a pro-Zionist perspective, their powerful statement became the classic summation of Revisionist politics until that point, and has been reprinted many times since:

Among the most disturbing political phenomena of our time is the emergence in the newly created state of Israel of the 'Freedom Party' (Tnuat Ha Herut), a political party closely akin to its organization, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties. It was formed out of the membership and following of the former Irgun Zvai Leumi, a terrorist, right-wing, chauvinist organization in Palestine . . . Today they speak of freedom, democracy and anti-imperialism, whereas until recently they openly preached the doctrine of the Fascist state. It is in its actions that the terrorist party betrays its real character . . . A shocking example was their behaviour in the Arab village of Deir Yassin . . . The Deir Yassin incident exemplifies the character and actions of the Freedom Party . . . they have preached an admixture of ultra-nationalism, religious mysticism, and racial superiority . . . in the light of the foregoing considerations, it is imperative that the truth about Mr Begin and his movement be made known in this country. It is all the more tragic that the top leadership of American Zionism has refused to campaign against Begin's efforts.[29]

Notes

1. Nathan Weinstock, *Zionism: False Messiah*, p. 225.
2. Haber, *Menahem Begin*, (uncorrected proof), p. 146.
3. Bauer, 'The Holocaust and the Struggle of the Yishuv as Factors in the Establishment of the State of Israel', *Holocaust and Rebirth*, p. 120.
4. Samuel Halperin, *The Political World of American Zionism*, pp. 216–17, 380.
5. Bauer, *Holocaust and Rebirth*, p. 120.
6. Begin, *The Revolt*, p. 149.
7. Ibid., p. 290.
8. Elmer Berger, *Pentagon Papers – 1947*, p. 20.
9. Eckman and Hirschler, *Menahem Begin*, p. 142.
10. *Revolt*, p. 296.
11. Ibid., pp. 143–4, and Haber, p. 209.
12. *Revolt*, p. 163.
13. Ibid., p. 164.
14. Ibid.
15. 'Colonel Meir Pa'el, who served as a communications officer for the Haganah in Deir Yassin in an interview with *Yediot-Ahronot* (4/4/1972)', *Begin And Co. As They Really Are*, (Israel Shahak, ed.), p. 41.
16. Nahum Barnes, 'Dir Yassin: We have returned to you', *Davar*, 9 April 1982.
17. Institute of Palestine Studies, 'By Jacques de Reynier', *Who is Menachem Begin?*, p. 17.
18. 'Rabbis Denounce Dissident Action', *Palestine Post*, 13 April 1948.
19. 'Agency Berates Massacre', *Palestine Post*, 12 April 1948.
20. *Revolt*, p. 164.
21. *Who is Menachem Begin?*, p. 14.
22. *Revolt*, p. 363.
23. Jon Kimche, *Seven Fallen Pillars*, p. 234.

24. *Revolt*, pp. 373, 376; Hirschler, p. 155.
25. Hirschler, p. 176.
26. Haber, p. 223.
27. Hirschler, p. 180.
28. Samuel Merlin, 'Menachem Begin: Orator, Commander, Statesman', *National Jewish Monthly*, July 1977, pp. 7–8.
29. 'New Palestine Party', *New York Times*, 4 December 1948, p. 12.

13. The 29 Years in the Desert

Herut: Early Election Performance

Was it not the Irgun that had won Israel its independence? Was not Jordan still under the yoke of the Hashemite Abdullah? Surely, the Israeli electorate, or at any rate 30–40% of them, inspired by Begin's oratory, would vote for the new party in the first Israeli election. So thought Menachem Begin, who was disappointed when, in the election of 25 January 1949, they won only 11.5% of the vote, and only 14 out of 120 seats in the Constituent Assembly. Herut finished third behind Ben-Gurion's *Mapai* (Israeli Labour Party), with 46 seats, and the *Mapam* (United Workers Party), then a pro-Soviet Zionist grouping, with 19 seats. The Religious Front, a coalition of Orthodox groupings, took 16 seats; the General Zionists, identified with Weizmann, won seven seats; the anti-clerical Progressives, a middle-class party, took five seats; the rest went to scattered elements including one seat for Nathan Yalin-Mor, who had been sentenced to eight years for leading a terrorist organization after Bernadotte's assassination, and who had been amnestied. The remnant of the old-line Revisionist Party also ran, but won no seats and soon merged with Herut. Since the Revisionists had re-entered the WZO in 1946, Herut was now part of a now united Zionist movement.

The 1949 campaign was to be only the first of eight successive electoral defeats before Begin was to finally come to power in May 1977. In its first few years the party rapidly accumulated the reputation of being Zionism's lunatic fringe and it took Begin not a few years after that to learn that the sacred principles of classic Revisionism only generated antagonism amongst a huge proportion of the population. It was because Begin moved, ever so slowly, and ever so slightly, toward the centre, and Israeli society as a whole moved, ever increasingly, toward the far right, that he was finally able to come to power.

From the beginning Herut's policy was the 'liberation' of all of Palestine. However, it was the Palestinian expellees, far from reconciled to their exile, who took the initiative, constantly trying to re-enter their lost villages, either in hopes of remaining or to remove what was, after all, their own property. Israel was then by no means an overwhelming power

and Ben-Gurion sought no immediate war of conquest. His reply to the incursions was ever more systematic retaliatory hit-and-run raids into the Gaza strip and the West Bank. Herut always saw such raids as futile, insisting all along that only the 'liquidation of Arab-occupied pockets of Jewish national territory' could solve the problem. Since the active programme of all Zionist parties is the conversion of Arab land into a Zionist state, no Israeli regime could have achieved genuine peace, but that is what the Jewish masses wanted, and Begin's constant call for war only alienated the broad public.

The chief domestic enemy was the Histadrut, and Herut fought it down the line. The party maintained the relatively miniscule Revisionist National Labour Federation, but the Histadrut had approximately 85% of the workers behind it. Herut therefore called for the nationalization of its labour exchanges, and for compulsory arbitration of wage disputes. They also demanded the nationalization of the Histadrut's Sick Fund which served the greater part of the population, and the divestment of its complex of factories and commercial establishments which made it the largest single employer in the country, as well as the abolition of special tax privileges for the kibbutzim. The pre-war immigrants who had built up the Histadrut were deeply devoted to it as the fruit of their toil and such a programme, tantamount to its dissolution, could only meet with their implacable opposition.

For the first few years of the new state there was no issue which Herut could use to attract a broad following. Begin utilized this period to write his *Revolt*, which not even he dared to call a history of the Irgun but rather a memoir, little more than a glorification of the Irgun. He visited Revisionist support groups in the US, Europe and Latin America, and on a visit to Argentina even had a cordial meeting with Juan Peron, already notorious for his own pro-Nazi sentiments during the war, and his welcome to thousands of Nazi war criminals.[1] In the second Knesset election Herut lost six of its 14 seats, as few could see anything attractive in its blustering and impotent extremism.

The 1950s

The Reparations Question

Hundreds of thousands of European Jews, and additional hundreds of thousands from the Arab world, flooded into the country. Huge immigrant camps sprung up and food and then clothing had to be rationed. Unless it was to sink into economic catastrophe, Israel had to do something, and Ben-Gurion decided to explore the possibility of getting reparations from West Germany. Speed was of the essence as he understood that the deepening of the cold war would mean that the Americans would become increasingly unwilling to pressure Germany on the issue. In the autumn of 1951, Nahum Goldmann held a meeting with Konrad

Adenauer, and the German agreed to a tentative figure of a billion dollars in reparations. Now permission had to be obtained from the Knesset for negotiations to continue.

Many Israelis, and many Jews, of all ideologies, felt that any monetary compensation could only be a desecration of the Holocaust victims' memory. The Mapam Party opposed negotiations, as did individual Mapai leaders, but the prime opponent of reparations was the Herut party and Menachem Begin. The Knesset was to debate the issue on 7 January 1952. That morning, Begin, speaking from a balcony, harangued an angry crowd of 15,000:

> When you fired at us with your cannon, I ordered our comrades to hold their fire. But today I shall give the order, 'Yes!' This will be a war of life and death . . . There is no German who did not kill our fathers. Every German is a Nazi. Every German is a murderer. Adenauer is a murderer . . . Maybe we will go to the gallows. No matter.[2]

Begin went into the Knesset to take part in the debate and the mob marched on the building, breaking through barbed wire and a wall of hundreds of police. While the legislators argued inside, the rioters started stoning the building. Rocks and glass fell into the midst of the assembly. Begin defied the regime, 'I know you will throw us into concentration camps . . . But there will be no "reparations" from Germany.'[3] In solidarity with the demonstrators he announced that he waived his parliamentary immunity. Outside, 200 were hurt, including 92 police, and 400 arrested. But two days later the parliament voted 61 to 50 to authorize continuing negotiations. Begin was temporarily suspended from the Knesset.* On 12 March, the day the negotiations publicly opened in the Hague, 70,000 people rallied in Tel Aviv. This time Ben-Gurion took the precaution of bringing thousands of kibbutzniks and Histadrut members into the streets to protect public buildings and this was enough to compel Begin to admonish the huge gathering not to be provoked into violence. The German reparations riot served only to discredit Begin, as billions of marks worth of German railways, telephones, docks, irrigation plants and oil, bought via British companies, and much else, including cash to individual Israelis, poured into the country over the next 12 years. Without the infrastructure provided by the reparations so bitterly opposed by Herut, it is doubtful whether Israel would have been able to maintain, let alone increase, the technological gap so essential to its continuous victories over its foes.

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*The biographers are hopelessly at odds as to how long Begin was suspended: Haber says two weeks; Hirschler and Eckman, three months; and Gervasi, several months.

Isolation After the Riots

Reduced in parliamentary representation, discredited by its fanatic opposition to reparations, the two years after the riots were Herut's period of deepest isolation. Begin utilized his time writing *White Nights* in 1953. While it is of no political value in dealing with Zionist ideology, and its predictions of a showdown after Stalin's death between the NKVD and the Soviet army never had any basis in reality, the book gives a picture of Stalin's prisons and camps, and is well worth reading.

Again Begin travelled, for his movement, to Europe, the US, Latin America and, from October 1953 to January 1954, to South Africa, the Rhodesias and even the Belgian Congo. He met the South African prime minister, Daniel Malan, whose Nationalists had bitterly opposed permitting Jewish refugees into the country during the Hitler era. On leaving South Africa, Begin sent a telegram to Malan:

> I will always cherish the memorable conversation with you, Mr Prime Minister . . . When, God willing, I am back home, I will tell my people about the sentiments prevailing amongst the people and the Government of South Africa for Israel and its welfare. I pray, hope and believe, that the friendship between our countries and people will be strengthened.[4]

The Suez Crisis and the Identity Card Issue

Herut did considerably better in the 26 July 1955 elections, jumping from eight to 15 seats. The constant border raids and the government's inability to solve the problem had won back the votes lost in 1951 to the General Zionists, who had gone from seven seats in 1949 to 20 in 1951 and who now fell back to 13 seats, again ranking behind Herut.

In September 1955, Nasser turned to the Soviet Union for assistance against Israel and Britain, which still controlled the Suez Canal, making a deal for Czech arms, and from then on Begin was in his element, calling for preventative war. As is known, Mapai needed no prodding from Herut on this score. When Nasser, in July 1956, announced the nationalization of the Canal, the joint Israeli–British–French invasion of 29 October inevitably followed. Naturally Begin supported it and, just as naturally, in 1957 he denounced Ben-Gurion for pulling out of Sinai and the Gaza Strip in the face of the obviously overwhelming opposition of both the US and the Soviet Union.

Begin visited South Africa for the second time on 14 August 1957, trying to play on the interest that South Africa had in the implications of the Israeli invasion of Africa the year before. But as an out of office extremist there was nothing that he could offer the apartheid regime. Domestically, Begin demonstrated himself a dead-end opponent of the secularization of Israeli life. On 22 June 1958, the government declared that anyone calling himself a Jew had to be given an identity card so stating. The decision created an uproar as the Orthodox insisted that only the child of a Jewish mother or someone converted by an Orthodox rabbi

could be considered a Jew. Herut does not make observance of the Jewish religion a criterion for membership, but Begin himself is semi-pious, keeping the kosher laws, and refusing to travel on the sabbath. He rose to join the religious parties in their opposition to the edict:

> Other nations started out as savages, living in jungles and caves, in fear of thunder and lightning, and in star-worship. Foreign nations came and forced *their* religion upon them . . . Our nation arose differently. It began with a divine promise . . . And it was by this promise that they returned to Eretz Yisrael . . . Does the government truly believe that, with regard to Jews, one can differentiate between religion and national identity? . . . Can a member of the Jewish people be a Calvinist, Anglican, Baptist, Anabaptist?[5]

The 3 November 1959 elections saw an insignificant breakthrough, Herut gained two seats, going to 17, and was now the second party.

The 1960s

In the 15 August 1961 election, the situation registered no change – the party was clearly going nowhere, and Begin was forced to make efforts to change his image. For many years he had been used to making speeches from balconies, and had taken to campaigning in an open Cadillac surrounded by an escort of motorcyclists, all with their sirens going. Balcony oratory was Mussolini's speciality, and the motorcyclists only reinforced the public's conception of Herut as being Fascist, and eventually Begin abandoned both.[6]

Herut: the Road to Respectability

The party was pushed considerably along the road to respectability in the spring of 1964, when the prime minister, Levi Eshkol, granting a Herut request, gave the order for Jabotinsky's body to be reinterred – not just in Israel, but on Mount Herzl, in the plot reserved for leaders of the movement. The event not only lent Herut new respectability but, more importantly, was another step in the Labour Party's evolution away from its leftish origins for, if Jabotinsky had indeed been a Zionist hero, he died the implacable foe of the Zionist labour movement. If the ceremony on Mount Herzl was purely symbolic, in April 1965 the party took its first genuine step towards power, forming a bloc, the Gush Herut–Liberalim, or Gahal, with the Liberal party, basically the former General Zionists. Both parties retained their independent existence but it was always understood that Begin was the bloc's leader. Although the two parties won only 26 seats in the November 1965 elections, seven less than the 34 seats they held in the previous Knesset – due to a split-off from the Liberals – nevertheless it was an enormous step forward for Begin. Now,

for the first time, there was a real prospect of his eventually coming to power through a coalition with additional right wing elements. Just as importantly, the Liberals insisted that Herut abandon its implacable opposition to the Histadrut and, after some discussion, Herut's members decided to join it. The Histadrut's leaders, knowing them to still be anti-labour, tried to exclude them, but the courts ruled that any political party had the right to organize a faction within the organization. With entry into the Histadrut, all talk about dismantling it faded away and the demand for compulsory arbitration was whittled down to compulsory arbitration in essential industries. The Liberals are a businessman's party, its opposition to Mapai was based on domestic economic issues, not military policy, and it had no interest in the notion that Jordan was really part of Israel; Begin generously allowed them to differ with Herut on this question.

It was the 1967 war that finally brought complete respectability to Begin and Herut. About to launch a pre-emptive strike against the Arab states, Eshkol asked Begin and a Liberal to join 'a government of national unity' as ministers without portfolio. The next day Begin reported to his mentor on Mount Herzl: 'Sir, head of Betar, we have come to inform you that one of your followers is now serving as a minister in the government of Israel.'[7] Begin caused no difficulties for the dominant Labourites until after the October 1969 election, in which the Gahal held its ground, retaining its 26 seats. Begin was not willing to remain in the cabinet of the then prime minister, Golda Meir, unless she agreed to a law establishing compulsory arbitration in essential industries, until the American Secretary of State, William Rogers, announced that the US would seek to settle the Middle Eastern question over the heads of the Israelis via negotiations with the Soviets. Plainly that would mean the return of at least some of the occupied territories. Begin felt he had to rally to Meir, who rejected Rogers' proposal, and he dropped the demand for compulsory arbitration. With that, another ideological obstacle to Begin's eventual ascession to power was overcome. Israel is a settlers' laager and such a state can only survive so long as its working class remains loyal to the regime. If the employers push the class struggle beyond what is 'normal' for capitalism, they run the very real risk that the workers, or a portion of them, will disaffect and even go over into an alliance with the oppressed nationality.

In 1969 the Israeli government thought it could force Nasser to end the 'war of attrition', the constant shelling of the Israeli Bar Lev line on the Suez, by deep bombing of Egypt. Soon the Soviets were involved on Egypt's side and it was obvious that the Israeli strategy had failed, that Nasser would not capitulate. World opinion was beginning to shift against Israel and the Americans took alarm at the deepening Soviet involvement. Rogers came up with a new initiative, a 90-day cease-fire and negotiations to end belligerency on the condition of a return of all or most of the occupied territories. Meir never thought that the negotiations

would go beyond ending the immediate strife on the Canal, which was not attaining Israel's purposes, and, rather than alienate the US, she accepted the Rogers plan. To Begin, the issue was one of principle, there were no 'occupied territories' but rather 'liberated Eretz Yisrael', and he would rather 'cut off my right hand' than stay in a cabinet that would even say it considered returning the territories. On 6 August 1970, Gahal voted against the government and Begin again took his seat amongst the opposition. However, even if he had left over the purely hypothetical question of the possible return of even an inch of the West Bank, from this time forward claims to the East Bank faded from Herut's propaganda. Three years in the intimacy of the cabinet, in a broad coalition running from the self-styled Marxists of Mapam to Herut, demonstrated to him that no other major tendency could be induced to ever go to war for Jordan. With the quiet abandonment of the first principle of Revisionism, the now respectable ex-minister genuinely became a serious contender for power. It is indeed difficult to envision the US ever allowing Hussein to lose his lands – the loyalty of the empire's satraps must be rewarded – but what if a Jordanian regime was to arise, hostile to the US? Erich and Rael Jean Isaac, two well-known Revisionist propagandists, are doubtlessly correct:

> The loyalty to the conception of Jabotinsky is such that if in a future war Jordan were to fall into Israeli hands, a Herut-led government would find this territory more difficult to relinquish than Sinai or the Golan.[8]

The 1970s

In February 1971, Begin was part of a government delegation to a conference on Soviet Jewry held in Brussels. He has never been in favour of Jews struggling within the Soviet Union, either for their rights as Jews or general democratic rights, but has always had one solution to the Jewish question in the Soviet Union. The faithful follower of Jabotinsky proclaimed that:

> instead of the demand 'Let my people go', we must revive the demand for the evacuation of the whole of Soviet Jewry – and be prepared to take in over two million of them within a short period.[9]

'Evacuation', of course, means emigration to Israel; Begin always denounced those Diaspora Jewish organizations that have helped Soviet Jews emigrate to the US.

Not only is the notion of a mass exodus of Soviet Jewry a fantasy – most Soviet Jews are profoundly assimilated, and the mixed marriage rate is even higher than in the West – but he later, in 1973, proposed a one-day American Jewish work stoppage while Brezhnev was visiting the

country. If Begin had, reluctantly, learned what is possible within the context of Israeli politics, such proposals – a general Soviet Jewish exodus, a nation-wide Jewish American strike – clearly demonstrated that he remained what he had always been: a congenital impossibilist.

Meir Kahane, head of the Jewish Defense League, was denied admittance to the conference by the organizers because of his espousal of terror. When he persisted, they had the police arrest him and he was deported from the country. Begin got up to declare that, while he did not know Kahane and was not endorsing his actions, 'the era in which Jews denounce other Jews to the police has passed forever'.[10] (At last count, Kahane has been arrested by the Israeli police no less than 66 times, many such times on the insistence of Begin.)

In January 1972 Kahane wrote the foreword to the new English language edition of *The Revolt*:

> This book is especially important for Jewish youth . . . Too many of them drink deeply of the exploits of other national liberation movements and have not the slightest idea that their own people possessed a liberation movement of exceeding purity and courage . . . One will never succeed in removing the pictures of Fidel, Che and Ho from the mind of a sensitive Jewish youth until he learns new names – Gruner, Ben Yosef, Hakim, Ashbel and Barazani.[11]

Third Trip to South Africa

In the autumn of 1971, Begin paid yet another visit to South Africa. As a former minister in the Israeli cabinet that had conquered the Sinai, and as Israel's most prominent friend of the Pretoria regime, he had a meeting with Johannes Vorster, the Prime Minister (who had been imprisoned in 1942 for his pro-Nazi sentiments). They discussed the Suez problem (the 1967 war had closed it), the subversive role of the Soviet Union, and the UN. Begin insists that he is opposed to apartheid but that, in this wicked world, Israel has to find its friends where it can, without consideration of their internal systems. Therefore, this self-styled opponent of apartheid had no hesitation in becoming the President of the Israel–South Africa Friendship League.

General Sharon and the Likud

The period between the 1967 and 1973 wars was the golden age of the 'heroes', when the parties avidly sought out the former generals of the incredibly successful Israeli army. The star performer of this little troupe was Ariel 'Arik' Sharon, who had started in the Haganah, and rose to prominence in the 1950s as the commander of 'unit 101', whose speciality was border raids. Later, as a general, he projected the same commando spirit as a regular IDF commander during the 1956 and 1967 wars. Retiring from the army in the summer of 1973, when it became apparent that he would not be able to fulfill his ambition to become Chief of Staff,

he joined the Liberalim. The former General Zionists were never military minded, in many ways they were the repository of the pacifist traditions of the shtetl petty bourgeoisie, their business was to make money, it was someone else's job, the Labour Zionists, the Revisionists, to fight Zionism's battles, and it was perfectly obvious that Sharon had only joined them because they had no other heroes in residence. Almost as soon as he joined, he quit and announced, in August, that if the Gahal and the other right wing parties did not immediately form a coalition that could stand up to the Labour Alignment, Mapai and Mapam, he would retire from politics. His idea made a lot of sense, particularly to the younger element in these rather isolated rightist political sects, and their pressure forced their leaders, including Begin, who initially feared for his personal leadership in a broad coalition, to set up the *Likud* (Unity) in September. The election was supposed to take place in October but had to be postponed until December because of the intervening 'war of atonement'.

The Egyptian–Syrian attack, with its brilliantly executed crossing of the Suez, initially stunned Meir and her Defence Minister, Moshe Dayan, who, because of their racism, underestimated the Arab capacity to wage modern war. However, within days, the Israelis were able to re-establish their military dominance and it was none other than Sharon, by making a daring crossing of the Suez and cutting off an Egyptian army in Ismailia, who had made it possible. Although the reality of 2,559 dead jarred Israeli society, bringing thousands of soldiers out into the streets in its aftermath, in some very disorganized demonstrations, in the next election the Alignment only lost four seats, going down to 51. But the Likud now had 39 seats, seven more than its components had in the previous Knesset, and was now a serious political alternative to the Alignment. At last, all of the essential programmatic and organizational prerequisites for Begin's victory were in place.

While the de facto abandonment of the Jabotinskyite notion of Jordan as part of the 'homeland' was crucial to Begin's prospects, he still remained the intransigent opponent of the slightest concession regarding the territories already in Israeli possession. He bitterly resisted the 'disengagement' agreements imposed on Israel by the US, which compelled Israel to withdraw from the Suez and from part of the Golan Heights. In 1975 Herut provocatively held its convention in Kiryat Arba, near Hebron, on the West Bank. Over the next years, Betarim entered onto the Temple Mount, now the site of the al-Aqsa mosque and the Mosque of Omar, civilian clothing covering their Betar uniforms, exposing their uniforms to pray and chant nationalist songs. Each time they were ejected by the Muslim authorities backed up by the Israeli police but in March 1976 their escapade provoked a serious riot in the old city.[12] However, it was not their own chauvinism alone that brought the Likud to power, but the collapse of Labour Zionism after 29 years in power and after eight successive electoral triumphs.

The Eclipse of the Labour Party

For several months prior to the May 1977 elections the Israeli public was shocked by a series of charges and convictions for corruption on the part of leading figures within the labour establishment. The Histadrut's director of Arab affairs in the Occupied Territories was found guilty of extortion while previously head of the Dimona labour council; then Asher Yadlin, head of the Kupat Holim, the Histadrut's health fund, was nominated Governor of the Bank of Israel and it came out that he had been taking backhanders involving real estate deals, keeping some of the money and turning over the rest to the Labour party to pay off its 1973 election debts. On 3 January 1977, Avraham Ofer, the Housing Minister, committed suicide after being accused of pocketing money from the sale of government-subsidized apartments, giving discounts to favourite journalists and public figures, etc. Although Ofer's suicide note indignantly denied the charges, no one doubted that he was guilty. If these incidents were not enough, on 15 March an Israeli paper uncovered the fact that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's wife had a dollar bank account in a Washington bank, in violation of Israel's currency laws. She admitted it, but insisted that only $2,000 were involved. However, in April, another paper discovered that the Rabins had two American accounts and that one of them was still active and contained $10,000. Rabin, caught lying, announced that he was resigning immediately (though, through a technicality, he stayed on as prime minister until the election).

It is not difficult to see why the Zionist labour movement became corrupt. In the intervening decades the party had lost all of its ideological moorings. Whatever it might say about representing the Jewish workers, it had been in coalitions with several capitalist parties; it had abandoned any secularist conceptions it once had and had made orthodoxy the state religion, primarily as a concession to the National Religious Party, the Mizrachi; it had developed ties with the American Jewish capitalists, eagerly seeking their investments, knowing full well that many of these folk were tax cheats; and had become intimately involved with the US government and the CIA, which funded Histadrut schools for African and Asian trade unionists.. And all of this was superimposed upon the expropriation of Palestinian refugee land and property in the wake of the 1948 war. It had entered history as a serious ideological tendency, attempting to merge nationalism and socialism, but it was attempting the impossible – a colonialist version of socialism – and the cynical mentality it developed in practice while doing this destroyed it, and it inevitably evolved into the Tammany Hall of Zion.

The bureaucratization of the Labour Party had helped to defeat it in yet another way: by 1973 the Likud had already beaten the Alignment amongst the 'Orientals', the Jews from Africa and Asia, and their Israeli-born children. Prior to the establishment of the state, Zionism, except in Yemen, had never been even remotely as strong in the Arab world as in Eastern Europe. However, the establishment of Israel triggered a wave

of anti-Jewish riots. While anyone with a detached mind can understand that it was Zionism that had brought tragedy on these 'Sephardic' Jews, the fact is that they blamed the Arabs for their plight, and they, in increasing numbers, began to respond to Begin's nationalism. By the time they had arrived in the state, the socialist aspect of Labour Zionism had exhausted itself, in 1946 the Histadrut had done away with its equalitarian pay-scale for its leadership, and the rapidly bureaucratized movement made no serious effort to defend the interests of the Sephardim. While a small section of them, the 'Black Pantherim' of the 1970s, moved into the orbit of Rakah, the local Communist Party, the bulk of the Orientals have become the chauvinist 'po' White trash' of the Israeli ethnic and political kaleidoscope.

The Likud Election Victory

Although the polls failed to predict a Likud victory, given the Alignment's legal difficulties, its defeat was inevitable. In the 1977 elections it lost 19 positions, going from 51 to 32 seats, the Likud went from 39 to 43. While the Likud increased its strength amongst the Sephardim, archaeologist Yigal Yadin's Democratic Movement for Change, a new good-government party, picked up 15 seats, most of them from Labour, strongly appealing to the 'Ashkenazi' middle class, thus clinching victory for Begin. The Likud took 33.% of the vote, up from 30.2%; Labour only 24.6%, down dramatically from 39.6%; the DMC 11.6%; and the religious parties 14%.

Begin put together a parliamentary majority beginning with the Mizrachi National Religious Party, which had previously been in Rabin's cabinet, but which had moved dramatically to the right by putting one of the leaders of the extreme chauvinist *Gush Emunim* (Bloc of the Faithful) on its ticket. The *Agudat Yisrael* (Union of Israel), a non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox party, primarily concerned to impose the restrictions of the Jewish religion on every aspect of Israeli life, agreed to vote for Begin's new coalition without entering the cabinet. Sharon, who had set up his own miniscule Shlomzion Party, which had won two seats, was given the agricultural ministry. Moshe Dayan, who had previously left the Alignment, became Begin's Foreign Minister. Months later, on 24 October, the Democratic Movement for Change also came into the cabinet.

On 21 June, Begin became Prime Minister of Israel; his first act was to hang a portrait of Vladimir Jabotinsky on the wall of his office. Although his most famous disciple had, grudgingly, abandoned some of his principles, there can be no doubt that Begin was, in fact, as devoted to the core of Jabotinsky's teachings as ever; that he was as racist, as colonialist, and as loyal to capitalism as his mentor. Yet his ascession to power was not a revolution within Zionism but rather an extension of the logic of development of the previous Labour Alignment governments. It was they, not he, who had started settling new colonists on the West Bank. It was they who told American Jewry to vote for Nixon, who forged the

links with the CIA. It was Rabin, not Begin, who invited Vorster to Israel in 1976. And it was Labour Zionism, not Revisionism, that first started arming the Phalange in Lebanon. Jabotinsky was ahead of his time, these things could not be rushed. Zionism had to go through several stages before it could reach its present form. Begin was not some sort of Zionist mutant; Zionism could only have developed behind an iron wall and, eventually but inevitably, its official ideology caught up with its reality.

Notes

1. C. C. Aronsfeld, 'Argentinian Uncertainties', *AJR Information*, October 1982, p. 1.
2. Haber, *Menahem Begin*, p. 236; Hirschler, *Menahem Begin*, p. 202; Gervasi, *Life and Times of Menahem Begin*, p. 273.
3. Hirschler, p. 203; Gervasi, p. 273; Haber, p. 236.
4. Harry Hurwitz, *Menachem Begin*, pp. 178–9.
5. Hirschler, pp. 222–3.
6. Hirschler, p. 225; Gervasi, p. 282; Haber, p. 247.
7. Haber, p. 268.
8. Erich and Rael Jean Isaac, *The Impact of Jabotinsky on Likud's Policies*, p. 4.
9. Hirschler, p. 263.
10. Ibid., p. 259.
11. *Revolt*, Foreword to 1972 Nash edition.
12. *Jerusalem Post*, 23 March and 2 April 1976.

14. The Road to Sabra and Shatila

Menachem Begin's stewardship of the Israeli state was, in every way, merely an extension of the prior history of Zionism and of the Revisionist movement. With hindsight, it is plain that his policies led, inexorably, to the monstrous denouement of Sabra and Shatila. His fanaticism is clear and it cost Israel irretrievable world support, treasure and, above all, human lives.

From the beginning, domestic questions were never his priority, but even on that level he was inutterably reactionary. Only in one regard was he, perforce, the moderate: the supra-union economic activities of the Histadrut and the Kibbutzim have not been disturbed, and only one state-owned company has been sold. The bureaucracies involved have proved impossible to shake. But his onslaught on the living-standards of the masses began almost immediately, in July 1977 and then in October of that year. Following the advice of Milton Friedman, the American economist, he sharply cut the subsidies that had kept down the price of essential commodities such as bread and petrol, raised taxes and permitted the free holding of foreign currency. Even the Histadrut bureaucrats, long used to acting as the government's vehicle for imposing wage restraints on the workers, were forced to call a one-hour work stoppage. However, before mass discontent could develop, he was handed an amazing diplomatic coup that, for a time, made it impossible for any Zionist force to effectively challenge him: on 9 November, Anwar el-Sadat announced that he was willing to come to Israel in the name of peace.

Sadat and the Camp David Agreement

The story of Sadat's journey to Jerusalem, the subsequent 'Camp David' treaty, the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai and, ultimately, Sadat's assassination, are well known and need not be presented here in more than their barest outline. The Egyptian's capitulation was, in a sense, long overdue. Sadat had broken with the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, before the 1973 war. He did not think that Egypt and Syria could win the

war, his goal was to convince the US that the Arabs could create complications in the Middle East, and that, therefore, the US should compel Israel to make concessions to them. His going to Israel was merely an extension of his strategic orientation towards America as the decisive factor in the Middle Eastern equation. He knew that the State Department had concluded, after the 1967 war, that Israel was the only right wing regime in the region that could be militarily counted on in the struggle against 'Soviet expansionism', which is how the State Department describes the indigenous nationalist and socially radical currents. What he sought to do was convince the imperialists that they could, in fact, rely on the new Arab state bureaucracies as well, in tandem with their 'loyal Jewish Ulster'. These elements, who live off their masses, have historically mobilized their people on occasion to wring independence from the imperialists, but their economic links to the West continue and, eventually, they have to choose: either they reintegrate themselves into the world capitalist economy and then seek to solve their immense internal development problems with the aid of the imperialists, or they move to the left. Sadat understood that the Americans had no intention of breaking with the Israelis and that a precondition for collaboration with Washington was a *de facto* halt to the struggle against Zionism. He decided on a strategy of outbidding the Israelis for American patronage, isolating the bellicose Begin, whom the Carter administration would see as an obstacle to its development of the deep opening into the Arab and African world suddenly provided by Sadat.

Television made Sadat's 19 November speech to the Knesset a world event, but the audacity of his move could not overcome the realities of the situation. Although the entire treaty proceedings are known as 'Camp David' from the conference there (5–17 September 1978), the final shape of the accords was fore-ordained by Jimmy Carter's declaration of 28 December, when he ruled out an independent Palestinian state. Washington well understood that independence would have been seen as a victory for the Palestinians, and that it would have inspired revolutionaries elsewhere to redouble their efforts. However, while Begin had assured the Sinai settler-fanatics that he would retire to Ne'ot Sinai, two miles east of El-Arish, he had to yield – to Carter – on this, as no Egyptian leader could hope to sell peace with Israel to his people with the settlements still on their soil. Then the defender of Jewish traditions found fit to follow the rabbis, who told him that the Sinai was not part of the Promised Land. (Technically it does begin there, precisely at the 'brook of Egypt', Wadi El-Arish, but Begin knew that claiming the brook was out of the question. Neither Carter nor Sadat cared for such biblical concerns.)

Defects of the Treaty

The treaty's defects are apparent on every line: the Palestinians had nothing to say about the pact; the Israelis agreed not to claim sovereignty

over the West Bank and Gaza for five years, but then could lay claim to the regions; Jerusalem was excluded from the treaties, leaving the status quo, that is to say Israeli control and sovereignty. The powers of the so-called autonomous council were not defined but would be settled by the Egyptians, Jordanians and the Israelis. The Israeli army would still be permitted to stay on at locations to be negotiated by the Egyptians and Jordanians and the Israelis. The existing settlements would remain and the question of new settlements was left unclear. The number of refugees permitted to return would be determined by the Israelis and the two states and the Palestinian authorities on the basis of economic feasibility rather than right. US troops, disguised as a 'multi-national' force, were to be placed between the Israeli and Egyptian armies, but only on Egyptian soil. As a sweetener, Washington was to provide Cairo with massive economic and military aid. This gross violation of the Palestinians' elementary right to self-determination was grotesquely capped, on 27 October, by the announcement that Begin and Sadat had won the Nobel Peace Prize.

After a heated debate in the Knesset, in which many of Begin's closest associates in the Likud, including Moshe Arens (later to become Israel's Defence Minister), voted against the pact because it meant giving up the Sinai, the accord became a fact on 26 March 1979, even if the so-called autonomy plan died in childbirth. Sadat was later to be assassinated, on 6 October 1981, at the hands of Islamic fundamentalists. That it was they who killed him and not the left was chance: agreeing to the abandonment of the rights of members of your nationality is universally understood to be treason.

The Israeli Economy under Begin

Economically, Israel under Begin became a disaster; although the treaty opened Egypt to Israeli goods, his policies, on the West Bank and subsequently in Lebanon, so alienated the Egyptian public that trade activity, after an initial spurt, sharply dropped. Unable to trade with its neighbours, due to the policies engendered by Zionism in general, and Begin in particular, the Israeli economy became completely political, totally dominated by militarism in its many aspects. Israel under Begin became the world record holder in a number of crucial economic indicators: the highest inflation rate; the highest per capita foreign debt; the highest taxes and, with approximately one-third of its manufactured exports being arms, it is the most weapons intensive export economy on earth.[1] Tiny Israel is now the seventh largest military exporter in the world and it may be said that without these sales, and without ever-increasing US aid, Israel would be bankrupt, that is to say, it could not possibly pay its short-term foreign debts or pay for more than two weeks' further imports.[2] Its agriculture is the most technically advanced in the

world, and it has the highest percentage of university-educated citizens (which accounts, in part, for its remarkable upsurge in military technology), but the undeniable talents of some of its citizens can never possibly overcome the weight of its military burden – it has to match Arab arms procurement and, because of that same built-in inability to come to peace with the Arabs it has no economic hinterland for its non-military exports. Increasingly it has turned to arms sales as the solution to its problems, acting as a proxy for the US in dealing with regimes that, for domestic American reasons, connected with these regimes unpopularity due to their wretched civil liberties records, Washington cannot fully arm. The sales have only served to generate world-wide antagonism toward Israel without nearly solving its fundamental economic difficulties. As an alternative, Israel must constantly lobby Washington for increased aid to meet its ever-increasing short-term debts. Again, this has caused an erosion of political support in the US as the American people can not understand why domestic programmes should be cut while Israel's already bloated arsenal is ever increased.

Real wages began to drop immediately, going down 3% in 1977, and they have continued to fall, dropping 2.5% in 1982.[3] Naturally, Begin's Israel being dominated by the capitalist ethic, the burdens of the economy have fallen on the poorest sectors of the population, Arab and Jewish, while the rich and much of the middle class temporarily gained ground, as many of them, paying no capital gains tax, pushed the value of the issues traded on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange from $66 million in 1976 to $20 billion by the end of 1982.[4] Working-class resistance to Begin's economics was never effective. Subsequent to the 1977 strike, there has been a constant struggle by the individual unions for wage and cost-of-living increases and, on 19 March 1979, the Histadrut called another nation-wide, half-day strike, followed by a two-hour nation-wide strike on 13 August. But these half-hearted efforts plainly were not enough: under the Labour government the Histadrut had become little more than a company union and an enormous percentage of strikes then were either directly against the Histadrut's own enterprises or wildcats against private firms. With the labourites out of office, the bureaucracy could show a little independence from the government but these were not the people who could ever lead a struggle against the status quo.

Intra-Jewish Antagonisms

While 70.5% of the local Workers Council secretaries were Oriental Jews, less than 25% of the Histadrut Executive were Orientals.[5] The old-guard Eastern European labourite bureaucrats remained exactly what they had become – a caste above the ranks – and any serious mass mobilization would inevitably have strengthened the demand for increased Sephardic representation at the national level. However, although

Begin gained support among the Oriental communities in the 30 June 1981 election, in reality the Sephardim lost ground under his administration. The income gap between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim actually increased.[6] By 1981, the average income of families of Afro-Asian workers had declined from 82.2% to 81.1% of that of Ashkenazi employees.[7] Households below the official poverty line – 40% of the median income – have jumped from 2.8% to 6.6% and, although families headed by African and Asian-born workers constituted only 32.4% of all Jewish families, they made up 52.1% of the poorest Jewish income decile.[8] In April 1983 the unemployment rate in some northern 'development towns', largely inhabited by Orientals, ran to 10%, twice the national average.[9]

There was a marked increase in intra-Jewish antagonism from the time Begin came to power and, for the most part, he was the beneficiary of that antagonism. During the 1981 election campaign, Alignment candidates were pelted with rubbish in Petah Tikva, two former prime ministers, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, were mobbed in Jerusalem and had to be escorted to their cars by police, the Labour Party branch in Tel Aviv was firebombed and cars bearing Alignment stickers frequently had their tyres slashed. Groups of Orientals would frequently try to drown out speakers at rallies by shouting 'Begin, king of Israel'. Ultimately Begin was compelled to disclaim the hoodlums: today Israel simply cannot afford to lose the support of its Diaspora Jewish supporters, most of whom are unprepared to back a dictatorship over Jews.

The majority of the Sephardic masses are just as strongly opposed to the Peace Now movement, a pro-Alignment peace front, because they see it as an Ashkenazi grouping. On rare occasions the intra-Jewish hostility has broken out from the narrow confines of Likud demagoguery. When an Oriental Jew was killed by police in the Kfar Shalem quarter in December 1982, while defending an illegally-built annex to his house, swastikas were painted in the rich 'Ashke Nazim' neighbourhoods, and hundreds of Sephardim chased Tel Aviv's Likud mayor, whom most had voted for, out of the district. To fully comprehend the 'Oriental' political phenomena it is necessary to appreciate that almost 12% of Israeli women, most of these born in Africa and Asia, are completely illiterate; that, in 1978, a Hebrew University survey revealed that 40% of the Jewish masses could not follow the news on their televisions because they were unable to understand terms such as 'inflation' and 'energy crisis';[10] that the army estimates that between 30,000 and 40,000 draft-age Jewish youths are not truly literate at a 3rd grade (primary school) level; and that 100,000 potential soldiers have, in effect, received no more than four years' education;[11] and that only 2% of Israel-born children of Afro-Asian parents have graduated from a university (as compared to 17.5% of the children of Europeans).[12]

Given their cultural level, their persecution at the hands of mobs in their historic homelands, and their more recent exploitation at the hands

of the Alignment bureaucracy, it would require a determined effort to mobilize them on any grounds for a principled break with the Herut, short of a considerable deepening of unemployment or a still more severe drop in their standard of living. This the Alignment can never do and, although the PLO is officially for a democratic secular state, and it frequently points to the exploitation of the Orientals in its propaganda, it does not recruit Jews. It therefore has no strategy for breaking the Orientals from Zionism, leaving that task to Jewish leftists, primarily the local Communists of Rakah. While Rakah has had a minimal success in forming an alliance with some remnants of the Black Pantherim, given the obvious reality that the central conflict in the country is between the Zionists and the PLO, the Jewish leftists who support the Palestinians cannot possibly overcome the Orientals' intense distrust of the Arabs until they see, in practice, that the Palestinians have no wish to kill them, and welcome them into the struggle as full comrades within the same organization. Until then, until the PLO speaks to them in Hebrew, which is what the younger generation now speaks, until it works out strategies to win them over, until they see Jews in the PLO, the Oriental neighbourhoods and development towns will remain the Shankill Roads of the loyal Jewish Ulster.

Religious Bigotry Under Begin

It has been said that if patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel, religion is surely the first. If chauvinism was Begin's prime crowd-pleaser, pandering to ultra-Orthodoxy was an integral component of his parliamentary strategy. The Likud as such has never been strong enough to rule on its own and has had to turn to the religious parties, the Mizrachi National Religious Party, the Agudat Yisrael and, later, Tami, for coalition partners. While the Mizrachi allied itself to the Revisionists in the early 1930s, it never thought of following them out of the WZO. And when the state was established, it entered into a coalition with the Labour party, and was part of every cabinet for the next 29 years, concerning itself with the spoils of politics and imposing the strictures of Orthodoxy on the state. The Aguda had opposed Zionism until the Holocaust, counselling passivity to the Jews of the Diaspora. That having proved a disaster, they have ideologically collapsed, accepting the state, though not Zionism. However, until Begin's victory, they never entered into the wheeling and dealing of coalition building. Both groupings are extremely conservative socially, and Begin's domestic programme presented no difficulties for them. His willingness to go beyond the already formidable religious concessions granted by the Alignment proved alluring, and the NRP immediately entered into Begin's first cabinet, with the Aguda supporting him with their Knesset votes.

It was not easy for Begin to push Israel even further down the road to

sectarian bigotry. There are many irreligious Zionists, not merely Alignment supporters, but in the Likud and even within the Herut itself. While Revisionism's turn towards the Orthodox began in Jabotinsky's time, he was not Orthodox, and it is difficult to conceive of him letting religion make as many encroachments on the state as even the Labour Party conceded, to say nothing of what Begin was prepared to allow. For the most part, he had to permit Likud MKs to vote on their own conscience on these matters and, as a result, it took him many years to push through what was, after all, not his Party's fundamental programme.

Israel drafts women (only Jewish women) into its army: however, the Orthodox have always insisted that their women could never serve as they must always be under the guardianship of first their fathers and then their husbands. They were granted exemption by the labourites, but basically it was up to the woman to prove that she was in fact Orthodox. Begin changed that, and now the authorities take her at her word.

Because of the long history of Christian persecution of Jews, most Jews hold Jewish converts to Christianity in contempt. Thus Begin had no difficulty in getting the Knesset to pass a law, in December 1977, making it a crime punishable by five years in prison to offer a material inducement to convert. These concessions did not significantly interfere with the status quo and were relatively easy to push through, but Begin was unable to get Likud-dominated Tel Aviv to ban theatrical performances on Friday nights until January 1980. The most controversial 'reform' was his amendment to the Termination of Pregnancy Law, which permitted abortions for social reasons. When he tried, in November 1979, to push through an amendment, he failed, though he personally voted for the restriction. It was not until December 1980, when he imposed party discipline, that he was able to get it through.

In March 1980 a law was passed clearly establishing that only the Orthodox rabbinate had the authority to say who may register Jewish marriages, thereby effectively affirming the total denial of legal status for the Reform and Conservative Jewish sects which, between them, include the vast majority of world Jewry that it still religiously affiliated. Despite the fact that they far outnumber the Orthodox in the Diaspora, in Israel they are both quite insignificant and not eager to assert themselves. The Alignment and Likud alike have been able to get away with denying them legal equality with Orthodoxy because their co-thinkers abroad are thoroughly bourgeois and non-demonstrative. It embarrasses the Diaspora Conservatives and Reformed that Israel discriminates against their faiths, but essentially their loyalty to Israel is racist – it is a Jewish state, therefore it is allowed to trample on their rights in a manner that would produce an outcry, even from those timid souls, if any other state were to duplicate Israel's approach.

Begin had promised to stop El-Al flights on Saturdays, but that, it was understood, would provoke the Histadrut, concerned about the loss of jobs, as well as cost the state $50 million, much of that foreign currency.

However, El-Al went broke and had to be reorganized. The Histadrut, concerned only with getting the company going again, and now willing to permit some lay-offs, went along with its reorganization and its new policy of not flying on the sabbath.

In many respects the most scandalous aspect of Begin's religious policy involved his Religious Minister, Aharon Abuhatzeira, who, in 1981, was tried for financial malpractice while a minister. Abuhatzeira was found not guilty at the trial when one of his co-conspirators, who had turned state's witness, did poorly on the stand. However, two judges made it quite clear that 'heavy suspicion' lay on the minister on one of the counts. Abuhatzeira himself had to admit that funds were allocated to religious organizations on the basis of political considerations. The Attorney General soon brought new charges based on Abuhatzeira's previous mayorial administration in Ramlah. The minister was a Moroccan and, sure enough, his followers saw the charges against him as an Ashkenazi plot to get rid of a Sephardi. Abuhatzeira broke with the NRP to set up his own party, *Tami* (Movement for Jewish Tradition), which swiftly gained the support of Nessim Gaon, the wealthy head of the World Sephardi Federation, and two other Oriental MKs. In the 1981 election the new party only polled 2.3% of the vote, but Begin needed its three Knesset votes for his post-election coalition, and Abuhatzeira, indictments and all, was duly appointed Labour and Immigration Minister in the new cabinet. He has since been found guilty of corruption and served a three month sentence, doing chores in a police station.

When the WZO was established, many early Zionists saw their movement as reforming and secularizing Jewish life. In reality it was doing no such thing, to the contrary, it was merely an internal Jewish brake on the secularization of the Jews. Nevertheless, in the early days, the majority of the movement's thinkers were personally not Orthodox and many were frank freethinkers. However, since the establishment of the state, the majority of immigrants have been Orthodox, and this continues to this day; inevitably, the movement has taken on an ever-increasing religious quality. Many of the more or less secular Zionists of the earlier period eventually made their 'peace with God'. Not only did Jabotinsky pander to the Orthodox, but Ben-Gurion, who did not himself observe the Orthodox dietary laws, made it mandatory that all military kitchens in the new army were Kosher. While the world, quite correctly, has focused its criticism on Zionism's racist hostility towards the Palestinians, its latter-day role as the defender of religious bigotry within the Jewish world must not be minimized. To Begin, the chief danger to Zionism within Diaspora Jewry was the ever-increasing tide of cultural assimilation and mixed marriage amongst the youth. To counter this, his prescription was that parents must see to it that children are taught the Hebrew language and the Biblical scriptures. Yet, although under the Law of Return, any Jew who converts to any other religion is no longer considered a Jew, modern Zionism, and this was so particularly under Begin, sees its closest allies in

the US as the Christian Evangelical fundamentalist (and racist) ultra right, who are determined to destroy the separation of church and state in the US. Begin had close contacts with Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority, who believes that the 'ingathering' of the Jews into the 'Promised Land' is a prerequisite for the Second Coming.

Ploughshares Into Swords: Israeli Arms Exports

Israel is now the world's seventh largest arms exporter and its customers form a Who's Who of the world's right wing. According to the *SIPRI Yearbook 1980*, published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (whose statistics are for the late 1970s), Israel's leading customer was South Africa, followed by Argentina and then El Salvador.[13] Additional customers now include Haiti, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Chile, Zaire, Taiwan and the Philippines. A special case is Iran, which is officially intensely anti-Zionist, but which Israel has armed so that it could continue its war against Iraq.[14] It must be fully understood that Israel began its role as an arsenal for world reaction under the Labour Alignment, and will continue as such under any succeeding administration. Indeed, it can be said with certainty, that only the defeat of Zionism will end its arms traffic. However, under Begin all concern about world opinion vanished and, in fact, under the Likud, Israeli politicians openly talk of Israel's role as an American proxy. Minister Yaakov Meridor, Begin's predecessor as the Irgun's commander, said in *Ha Aretz* (25 August 1981):

> We will say to the Americans; don't compete with us in Taiwan, don't compete with us in South Africa, don't compete with us in the Caribbean or in other places where you cannot sell arms directly. Let us do it. You will sell ammunition and equipment through an intermediary. Israel will be your intermediary.[15]

By all indications, South Africa is Israel's second most important ally, after the US. Sometime after Begin came to power, South African Foreign Minister Reolof Botha paid a visit to Israel, which was reported in the *Christian Science Monitor* on 7 September 1977. Thence forward such visits have been quite public. In February 1978, Finance Minister Simcha Ehrlich visited Pretoria and *Ha Aretz* reported (7 February) that Israel would act as a way station for South African goods which would thereby enter the EEC and the US as Israeli made, thus beating the boycott against the apartheid regime.[16] On 14 December 1981, the *New York Times* reported that Defence Minister Ariel Sharon had just spent ten days with the South African army in Namibia:

> Sharon . . . said that South Africa is one of the few countries in Africa and southwestern Africa that is trying to resist Soviet military infiltration . . . Sharon . . . reported that South Africa needed more modern weapons if it was to fight successfully against Soviet-supplied troops.[17]

On 23 June 1981, the *Rand Daily Mail* reported that Israel was training Unita guerrillas in Namibia, against the Angolan regime; in September the *Economist* reported there were 200 Israelis training troops in South Africa.[18]

By its very nature, Israeli-South African nuclear weapons development is shrouded in secrecy, but that it exists can scarcely be doubted. Again, it began under the Alignment, but it seems to have gone into high gear under the Likud. In March 1980 the then Defence Minister, Ezer Weizman, paid what was supposed to be a secret trip to South Africa, but it got into the Israeli press amid reports that the expedition was connected with nuclear submarine development. On 11 December, *Ha Aretz* cited reports about co-operation between Taiwan, South Africa and Israel to produce an advanced cruise missile. On 17 May 1982, *Ha Aretz* quoted a new book, *Two Minutes Over Baghdad*, as claiming that the same trio have developed a neutron bomb and were working on a cruise missile with a 2,400 kilometre range, as well as a nuclear cannon.[19]

US Support for Israel

While the Carter administration made some sounds about human rights and, on occasion, criticized Israeli policy in the occupied territories, generally speaking Carter supported Begin. Reagan, again, on occasion, demonstrated his displeasure with Begin. After Begin bombed the Osirac nuclear reactor in Baghdad on 7 June 1981, he halted delivery of some fighters, only to send them in August. In December that year he suspended the newly-signed Memorandum of Understanding for Strategic Cooperation, after Begin extended Israeli civilian law to the Golan Heights, thereby virtually annexing it. The invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 compelled Washington to delay review of possible sale of 75 F16 aircraft, and stop shipments of cluster-bomb artillery shells. Eventually Reagan restores what he has denied; on 14 June 1983 Washington announced that it was willing to revive the Memorandum if Israel was willing. The excuse usually given for restoring some aspect of US patronage is that Israel must be 'reassured' that America has no intention of putting its security into question. So reassured, it was always argued, Begin would prove to be more 'flexible' towards the Palestinians. Of course this is absurd, the Herut will never give up an inch of 'Eretz Yisrael'. For all his ideological fanaticism, Begin was extremely shrewd in practical matters and understood American politics far better than the

American politicians understand Zionism. He knew that they need Israel as much as Israel needs the US.

To the American ruling class, the Persian Gulf is crucial: they know that if Saudi Arabia's oil were to fall out of their orbit it would be the end of their world power and, therefore, they have armed that country to the hilt, as well as Egypt, Jordan, Oman, North Yemen and the Sudan. Yet they have no confidence in any of these regimes, which have notorious histories of coups and assassinations. Worse still, in all of them pan-Arab nationalism is the dominant ideology amongst the masses. Sympathy for the Palestinians runs deep, therefore Israel, and this was particularly so in an Israel under Begin, acts as an abiding goad to intense social discontent. The pro-US regimes naturally have no interest in rousing the masses against Israel, for to do so would unleash forces that would undoubtedly quickly turn on them as well. But their do-nothing posture during the Lebanon invasion has only served to make them yet more hated. The US knows that it cannot rely upon any Arab army to withstand an eruption of nationalist fervour, which could arise for multitudinous reasons, not the least of these being some gross Israeli provocation. In the end, though Israel generates mass antagonism that could imperil the old order, its army is the only local force that the Americans think they can rely on to help them crush any revolutionary outbreak. Reagan knows that the reactionary regimes will do nothing to try to stop such a strategic alliance with Israel. For many years, Begin tried to convince the US that Israel was integral to the defence of 'the free world' against 'Soviet aggression' and he knew that whatever concerns America had regarding his proclivity to war, he did not have to trouble himself.

If anything, the Democrats are far more pro-Israeli than the Republicans and the Israeli government is thus unconcerned by the possibility of Reagan being defeated for re-election. Traditionally, the Democrats get their large campaign donations from two sources: the trade union bureaucrats, with their ties to the Histadrut, both overt and covert; and rich Jews, who have been with them since the days of Jewish immigration into the country. These same contributors are major supporters of Israel and it is unthinkable that any significant element within the Democratic Party, except possibly the Blacks, will ever break with their meal ticket.[20] Already the Congressional Democrats have forced a reluctant Reagan to increase the outright grants to Israel in his 1984 aid package by $400 million.[21] Jabotinsky always insisted that Zionism's fate was integrally connected to capitalism and imperialism; in today's troubled Middle East, capitalism's destiny is equally linked to Zionism. Therefore, although the American politicians piously wish to see the Likud replaced by the 'responsible' Alignment, which would make some concessions to the Jordanians, if not directly to the Palestinians, as long as the Likud can hold its majority in the Knesset and among the Israeli public, and as long as there are no more complications like the Beirut massacre, it is assured of the support of the US, however grudgingly given.

The Chosen People Choose Again: the 1981 Election

The low point of Begin's popularity was undoubtedly in January 1981, when he was compelled to call an early election for 30 June, four-and-a-half months in advance of the end of his statutory term. A quarrel had broken out between two ministers, the NRP Education Minister supporting an education commission's recommendation for a 60% pay rise for teachers, and the Finance Minister opposing the increase as certain to incite other workers. When the cabinet backed the raise, the Finance Minister resigned and took his Rafi Party out of the Likud. The drop in real wages, the sharp rise in inflation, which was then the highest in the world, coupled with the previous resignations of Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and then Ezar Weizman, his Defence Minister (both convinced that Begin's unwillingness to negotiate anything like the autonomy for the West Bank and Gaza that even Jimmy Carter had insisted on in the Camp David accords could only alienate both the American public and government), had brought Begin's popularity down to a mere 14% in the opinion polls.[22]

The Alignment's Alternative

The Alignment's programme was primarily focused on its terms for solving the Palestinian question within the framework of the accords. To Begin, Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael was a sacred principle and even agreeing not to formally insist on sovereignty for the five years required by the treaty was an immense compromise, but to actually withdraw from even an inch of the West Bank was always out of the question. To the Alignment, the territories were an attractive dowry, but not so the bride. According to the (preliminary) Labour Party programme:

> Israel has always been designed and destined to be a Jewish, independent and democratic state, maintaining full equality of rights for all of her citizens without difference by faith or nationality. Out of fidelity to this historic aim, the policy of the Likud, aiming at annexation of the whole West Bank and Gaza and their inhabitants, must be rejected. This policy leads to turning Israel from a Jewish into a binational state.[23]

The labourites knew that, in the long run, Israel can only maintain itself if it is in tandem with Washington's conceptions. What they offered was essentially the Camp David accords as interpreted by Carter: they favoured the 'Jordanian solution', i.e. turning over the densely populated areas to Hussein (but keeping the existing settlements under Israeli sovereignty, keeping the old city) and 'only' building new 'security settlements' in uninhabited areas – the Jordan Valley, near the Dead Sea, along the coast between Egypt and Gaza – they would also keep most of the Golan – for security reasons, of course, the army would have to stay in

those regions – and the refugees would be resettled on the West Bank or even in Jordan.

Perceptive readers will have no difficulty understanding that this programme could never even begin to achieve peace – no self-respecting Palestinian would ever accept such a Bantustan – but to even get a chance to try to implement their colonialist programme they first had to beat Begin, who was down but not out. However, the labourites took to quarrelling over who would be minister of what in the cabinet they felt so certain of setting up. And all the while their lead in the opinion polls began to shrink, day by day. As stated, they had no real programme to bring the Orientals into equality with their Ashkenazi base, and Begin's Finance Minister shrewdly announced a new economic policy, which all outside observers correctly saw as 'election economics', certain to increase the already massive foreign debt, and which could only be paid for by US taxpayers. There were tax cuts on consumer durables, notably colour televisions and new cars, both costly import items; and price freezes and increased subsidies to keep down the market cost of basics. Clearly all this was unprincipled for a coalition that had been lecturing the public on the virtues of old-fashioned frugal capitalism, but such 'reforms' brought the Liberals' Ashkenazi middle class falling back into line. And, while the Alignment's line on the Palestinian question was the crudest chauvinism, they could never hope to compete with the gifted Begin on that score: he saw to it that, three weeks before the election, his pilots bombed the Osirac nuclear reactor in Baghdad.

Price cuts and a bombing together are heady stuff, and the Oriental masses vented their contempt for their Ashkenazi social superiors by their violence at Alignment rallies, so much so that Begin's own Ashkenazi backers began to take alarm, and he was compelled to speak out against his over-exuberant supporters.

The Vote

In the end, the election was decided on communal lines. The Alignment's vote shot up from 24.6% to 36.6%, but only because the Democratic Movement for Change had collapsed between the two elections, and its middle-class Ashkenazi following went back to the Alignment. The Likud gained as well, going from 33.4% to 37.1%, increasing its vote among those born in Africa and Asia from 46% to 66%; going up from 65% to 72% among their Israeli-born children, while even gaining slightly amongst the European-born, moving up from 19% to 24%, and going from 23% to 32% among Israelis born of European parentage.[24]

While the vote for the two main contenders was very close, the three religious parties, the NRP, Abuhatzeira's breakaway Tami, and the Aguda, were at least as far to the right as Begin on essentials, and, despite Labour's sharp rebound in terms of votes, there could be no doubt that the election gave Begin a mandate for a free hand to continue his essential policies, and bring the country even further down the road to theocracy.

The Increase in Racism

Although Begin's West Bank policy attracted more attention, his policy towards Israel's Arab minority, 17% of its population – technically its citizens, and promised equal rights in its Declaration of Independence – proves what the fundamental basis of Zionism really is: racism. In this regard, again, Begin only built upon the discriminatory foundation already set in place by the Alignment; nevertheless he made some innovations.

Because Israel is a client state of the US, which has a mass of laws guaranteeing equality before the law, and Zionists hesitate to provoke liberal antagonism there by formal legal discrimination, Israeli racism takes on a hypocritical aspect. But this began to break down under Begin. Thus, the slow cancellation of the subsidies on food made it obligatory for the government to 'compensate' the very poorest Jews, who, as seen, were among Begin's most partisan supporters. Meron Benvinisti, writing in *Ha Aretz*, described how Begin slyly discriminated against the Arab poor:

> The Israeli government's decision to limit this partial compensation to 'ex-soldiers' only – i.e. to deliberately exclude all the Arab population went almost unnoticed among the demands and protests.[25]

The Israeli army is officially discriminatory: Jewish males are drafted, as are Druse males (they are Arabs, but their religion is extremely accommodating to any powers that be), but Christians are not drafted, though they may volunteer. Town-dwelling Muslims (the majority of the Arab population) are neither drafted nor permitted to volunteer (Bedouins are allowed to volunteer – traditionally they have been antagonistic to the town dwellers and indifferent to nationalism; the very small Circassian minority, who are Muslims but not Arabs, are drafted). Benvinisti goes on:

> Arabs have been discriminated against ever since the state of Israel has existed. Israeli Arabs live in the shadow of discrimination in almost every sphere of life. The present government only changed the style, not the context. Up till now discrimination was justified by 'objective' and 'practical' arguments, such as security . . . Now it seems that the government doesn't need these delicate explanations.[26]

These 'ex-servicemen' laws have become all-pervasive, affecting employment as well, as when in 1978 the Minister of Transport changed the merchant marine regulations governing the appointment of officers so that promotions to the post of chief mechanic required prior service in the military.[27]

The 'veterans' rationalisation for discrimination has likewise been

extended into education. In 1982 discounts for tuition were granted to such veterans, but other forms of preference were extended as well, with special considerations for scholarships and loans being given to students from development towns (most frequently Orientals) but only one Arab town was designated as a development town.[28]

Some sociologists have noted that one of the best ways of judging a society is on the basis of how it treats its women. Here the Likud government is actually a small step ahead of its predecessor for, on 1 January 1982, an Equal Opportunity in Employment Law went into effect which outlawed discriminatory advertising or hiring. However, Nitza Shapira-Libal, then Begin's adviser on women's questions, candidly admitted that the act did not cover dismissals for pregnancy, promotion or retirement; and of course it did not protect Arab women.[29]

The West Bank

The plight of the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza is well-known as conditions there have formed a staple of the world press for many years, and it is not necessary to further document their circumstances here, save to say that civil liberties as any American or Western European knows them simply do not exist there: there are no legal political parties or unions, and strikes are illegal. The press is completely censored, anyone may be arrested and imprisoned at the discretion of the authorities without trial, or at best a trial before a military court. In 1977 the London *Sunday Times* categorically insisted that the Israelis, in this case again the Alignment, were systematic torturers in the territories. Since then, Begin maintained that his government did not countenance torture. However, on 1 May 1979, the *New York Times* ran a photograph of Ismail Ajweh, publisher of the East Jerusalem paper *Al Shaab*, taking a lie detector test under the eyes of Mordechai Gazit, former director of the Police polygraphic laboratory: Ajweh had been held for 120 days without charges, and claimed that he was tortured for 18 days – and then was kept in solitary confinement for 60 days. Said Gazit:

> On the basis of the findings of the polygraph examination, it seems to us that Mr Ajweh told the truth and in fact was tortured during his investigation.[30]

Brutality has never stopped. On 31 May 1983 the *New York Times* ran another story, based on an interview with Pvt Arthur Kutcher, an American-born Israeli reservist, who had just done his service on the West Bank. Among other things, he related that:

> he was assigned to guard detention cells for those arrested by the Shin Beth [secret police], cells, he was told, were windowless and without toilets, where prisoners were kept for a day or two. Although he did not go inside them, he could see that the windows were bricked up, he said, and there was a terrible stench. 'It had the smell of a very unclean lavatory.'[31]

There can be no illusions as to the purpose of the Zionist state terror on the West Bank. In 1982 Robert Friedman, an editor of *Present Tense*, a staunchly pro-Zionist magazine, interviewed Hagai Lev, who Begin sent to New York to head Herut-USA. Friedman explains that:

> Neither Lev nor Begin . . . advocates forcibly evicting the Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank . . . But, pointing out that Israel has a particular problem in the occupied territories – for Judea and Samaria could hardly be Jewish with a population of nearly 1 million Arabs and only some 20,000 Jews – Lev suggested that the Arabs would eventually get fed up with life under Israeli rule and leave 'voluntarily'. In fact, in a way that is already happening, Lev noted with some enthusiasm, for the number of Arabs in the West Bank has remained constant since 1967, even though the area has the highest birthrate in the world.[32]

The Holocaust in Beirut

Begin shall surely go into the history books primarily identified with the Dir Yassin and Beirut massacres. Even if it can be maintained that the invasion of Lebanon was a military success – after all the PLO was driven away from the border and out of Beirut, and effectively eliminated as an independent military force – the Beirut massacre was a political disaster so severe that it will be seen as the decisive turning point in the history of the Israeli state. This is so in spite of the fact that Begin himself was able to remain in power after the massacre and his American patrons actually increased their material support for him. For, in the end, von Clausewitz's celebrated maxim is true: war is the continuation of politics by other means. Neither Begin nor anyone else could perpetually overcome domestic alienation and global isolation through war. In the modern world it is active public sentiment expressed through demonstrations and movements that is decisive, not weaponry. If America's capitalists still embrace the Likud, for all their reservations about it, millions of ordinary Americans, most of them pro-Israeli when the invasion began, soon looked at Begin in the way they once saw Richard Nixon, the very incarnation of evil. Even more important, the massacre brought 400,000 Israelis, at least 300,000 of them Jews, into the streets for one of the largest anti-war demonstrations of the modern age. That these, in their vast majority, still see themselves as Zionists is no small thing, but when broad masses begin to radicalize they usually bring with them the ideology instilled in them by the institutions of their society; they want an idealized version of what they have been taught. Only through attempting to attain their impossible hopes do they grasp that revolution is the only possible solution to their predicament. The growing anti-war movement among the military will learn, soon enough, that the Alignment and Peace Now leaders will not support a conscientious objector movement in the Israeli

army, no matter how much they may oppose the Likud's policies. Eventually those soldiers will realize that they must go beyond them, and beyond Zionism, to unite with its prime victim, the Palestinians, in a new and democratic secular movement for a democratic secular Palestine.

The Invasion-in-the-Making

There can be no doubt that the attempted assassination of Shlomo Argov, the Israeli Ambassador to Britain, on 3 June 1982, was only the pretext for the assault on Lebanon. The PLO had nothing to do with the Argov affair and, a few days later, Prime Minister Thatcher declared that the would-be assassins were from Abu Nidal's anti-PLO faction, and that the PLO's London representative was on the terrorists' 'hit list'.[33] The extremely well-informed *New York Times* correspondent in Israel, David Shipler, wrote after the massacre that the initial plan for an incursion was developed in the spring of 1981, primarily motivated by a desire to head off what appeared then as an imminent defeat for Israel's Lebanese rightist clients. The scheme had to be shelved when the Americans got the PLO to agree to a cease-fire in July 1981, but Sharon was determined to go ahead with it and frequently discussed it with diplomats (presumably American). He was concerned to have it happen before the September 1982 Lebanese Presidential elections.[34] For months beforehand, the Israeli press carried stories on the invasion-in-the-making.[35] In fact the plan was actually leaked and the left-Zionist Parisian magazine, *Israel and Palestine*, carried an extremely accurate description of it in March 1982:

> This extraordinarily dense strategic plan, now being tested as war games in various computerized war-rooms around the world, also envisages as just one act what is the whole play-scenario of the 'minimalist' strategy in Jerusalem: the destabilization of the PLO, conquest of southern Lebanon up to the Litani river and creation of a Bashir Gemayel dynasty of right-wing Phalangists in what will remain of Lebanon; with some areas either going to Syria or remaining as rump enclaves, governed by tame Moslems . . . most of the Palestinians now in Lebanon are scheduled to be deported – or driven out by warfare and a wave of assassinations – into neighbouring Jordan . . . The plans also include a takeover of the Lebanese capital in order to assassinate or otherwise destroy the whole present PLO leadership. Beirut's takeover would be followed by an 'internationalization' of Lebanese occupation and end in an Israeli withdrawal (after the first wave of massive killings is over) to be replaced by an international force under American control.[36]

The Crisis of Arab Society

War, like its parent, politics, is a dialectical event, an interrelationship between extremes. Israel could not have romped through Lebanon but for the failings of the Arab political establishment, including the PLO.

Saddam Hussein in Iraq had invaded Iran and had been driven back to the border. Desperate to get out of the war he had started, he called upon Khomeini to grant him a cease-fire, allegedly so that both could then go to the aid of the Palestinians. The Iranians hoped to deal a mortal blow to the Iraqis, and the war there ground on, to the detriment of the Palestinian cause. The avowedly capitalist states, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates, had no interest in fighting for the Palestinians and instead threw their wealth behind Iraq, out of fear that a Khomeinite victory in that conflict would trigger off popular explosions in their own societies. Hosni Mubarak, Sadat's political heir, remained the apostle of the late ruler's pro-imperialist orientation, and the Maghreb states did nothing. Libya, for all its wealth and arms, has only two million people and, with a hostile and vastly numerically superior Egypt between him and Israel, Qadaffi could only offer the PLO the advice that, instead of withdrawing from Beirut, it should commit 'revolutionary suicide'. Syria's army is a good one but its air force has been pitiful against the Israelis, who promptly savaged the Soviet-Syrian missile defence. The Syrians soon realized that if they continued to fight on the ground the Israelis would simply destroy their army, and they had to, in effect, drop out of the war.

The PLO's troops fought bravely, but without an air force or a tank corps, its situation in a positional war was hopeless. Later, many Palestinians faulted their leaders because, amongst other things, the factional militias were separate from the broad mass of the people, who were not armed. Beyond doubt, the Israelis would have hesitated to attack if they knew that they would have to face an armed people, or if they did attack, they would have suffered far greater casualties, but that severe omission was but one aspect of the PLO leadership's inadequacies in the pre-war period. For years prior to the July 1981 'truce', the factions within the PLO had competed with each other in impotent bravado, featuring avowedly suicidal fedayeen raids, concluding, in March and April 1981 with pathetic raids across the border using hang gliders and balloons.[37] Within Palestine, terror bombs took the place of mobilizations of the Arab majority in the Galilee and in the occupied territories. While there were always spontaneous demonstrations, and some were organized, these were never the central concern of the Beirut-based exile militarist leadership. After their rout from Jordan in 1970, the leaders began to lose faith in their concept of a democratic secular state for all of Palestine. After 1974, when they adopted a utopian reformist interim programme looking for a mini-state on the West Bank, their militarist efforts became little more than violent 'temper tantrums', designed to make the world take notice of their plight, in the hope that the West would put pressure on the Israelis to compel them to withdraw from the West Bank.

Parallel to their hollow reliance on diplomacy, the PLO – here most notably its dominant organization, Arafat's Fatah – took a position of non-intervention in the internal affairs of the Arab states, even though it was well understood that most of the regimes were either the open or

secret enemies of the Palestinian cause. They took the line of least resistance, seeking to wheedle what they could from them, and they ended up taking subsidies from two of the most despotic, Saudi Arabia and Morocco, knowing that the grants were nothing more than hush money, given so that the regimes could retain credibility in the eyes of their own people. Arafat saw the Palestinians in a position of weakness *vis-à-vis* both the Israelis and the Arab states and he could not grasp that only revolutionary organization and audacity could get them out of their impasse. Instead the PLO temporized and evaded its nationalist duty to mobilize the masses, everywhere, throughout the Arab world, for elementary democracy. The Fatah leadership had a choice: get what it could from the Arab states, or try to act as a democratic yeast within Arab society. They were conscientious, they were trying to do the right thing, but they were bourgeois nationalists, they made the wrong choice, and they paid a bloody price for it.

Their local ally, the Lebanese National Movement, was in even worse shape, and was hopelessly divided into rival, frequently warring, militias. The more conscious of the groupings, as with the Communist Party, saw themselves as hopelessly overwhelmed by the intervention of the Arab states, particularly the Libyans, Syrians and Iraqis, who subsidized various armed factions. But, even with Saudi money coming in, the Lebanese state had effectively ceased to exist many years before the invasion, its army being more frequently seen on the television screen than in the streets. However, the LNM had not boldly convened a constitutional convention to replace the confessional state, nor had it made any serious effort to administer the areas within its military control. The LNM was certified bankrupt long before the invasion. While some of its components, notably in Beirut, fought valiantly, its more conservative elements, notably the Druse-based Progressive Socialist Party, did not, lying still in its mountain fastness. Politically, the LNM blew apart in the crunch.

Israeli Military Success in Lebanon

Once the Israelis knocked out the Syrian missiles in the Bekaa valley on 9 June, and the Syrians agreed to a truce on 13 June, the issue was no longer in doubt. The PLO militias fought well enough but were no match for the massive arsenal they faced, and the Israelis rolled up to Beirut and linked up to their Phalangist clients, who had been holed up in East Beirut. West Beirut was subjected to a merciless siege. In the US, on 12 June, 750,000 rallied for a multilateral nuclear freeze. But, while the more left-wing speakers did denounce the invasion, the bulk of the orators stayed away from the war, and both Begin and Reagan now knew that they had nothing to fear from the US peace movement. On 13 June, King Khalid of Saudi Arabia died and one of the mourners at his funeral was Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, marking the first time that Egypt had been able to break out of its isolation in inter-Arab politics since the Camp David accords.

Rather than being a sign of the closing of Arab ranks, Mubarak's presence meant that the other reactionary states were also capitulating to the Americans, and were certain to do nothing for the Palestinians. On 18 June Begin had the audacity to appear at the UN to discuss disarmament. While 100 delegations, two-thirds of the membership, boycotted his speech, the anti-Israeli majority there permitted the US to veto Security Council resolutions against the invasion, thus again assuring Begin that he could continue with impunity.

But on 25 June, the reality of world opposition broke through, obliquely, with the forced resignation of Alexander Haig as US Secretary of State. General Haig had become obsessional in his militarism and was too obvious in his support for Begin's blitzkrieg. His replacement, George Shultz, the President of the Bechtel Group Inc., deeply involved to the tune of billions in construction in Saudi Arabia, was widely thought to be 'pro-Arab', and indeed he did make some sounds about Palestinian rights on the West Bank at his confirmation hearings. However, *Business Week* quickly set the world straight as to what really could be expected from him:

> the new realities created by the invasion of Lebanon . . . require dramatic changes in the tone and implementation, though not necessarily in the fundamentals, of US foreign policy.[38]

On 26 June the first important anti-war demonstration took place within Israel as 15,000 attended a rally called by the Committee Against the War in Lebanon, a coalition of Zionists to the left of the Alignment and anti-Zionists. The Committee had grown out of the previous Committee to Defend Bir Zeit University, organized to protest against the suppression of academic freedom there. The Bir Zeit Committee had never been able to bring out more than 5,000 people, and the Alignment oriented Peace Now grouping – which had originally decided that their Zionist loyalism would not allow them to demonstrate against the war – realized that they were in danger of being swept aside if they did not move, and they called a demonstration for 3 July. Between 70,000 and 100,000 rallied against the invasion, although the organizers of the gathering prohibited any signs in support of the PLO. The Likud, however, was still able to bring out an equal number for a counter-demonstration on 17 July. By 19 July even the not overly squeamish Reagan was compelled to suspend further deliveries of cluster-bombs. The television coverage of the brutal siege began to bring out increasing numbers of demonstrators, particularly in Western Europe, but also in America, which previously had been Zionism's second citadel. Washington understood that a bloody conquest of Beirut would provoke too much of a world outcry, and Reagan organized an international expedition made up of US, French and Italian troops to stand between the Israelis and the PLO's soldiery as they withdrew from the city; this they did,

between 21 August and 1 September.

On 23 August, the Lebanese parliament elected a new President for the country. Under any circumstances, a Lebanese election is a caricature of democracy, as the parliament is elected along confessional lines, with the seats allocated to the sundry sects on the basis of their proportions in the out-of-date 1932 census (Christians were 55% of the population in 1932, and have 54 of the 99 seats in the present parliament, despite the fact that the Muslims and Druse are now approximately 60–66% of the people). The President has to be a Maronite (Catholics, but following their own traditional rites and customs, at considerable variance with the 'Latin' norms of the world-wide church); the members of this particular parliament had been elected ten years before and had arbitrarily extended their six-year terms, using the circumstances of the civil war as their excuse to stay on. The election took place in a military barracks, guarded by the invader's troops, and there was only one candidate, Bashir Gemayel, the leader of the Lebanese Forces – the militia dominated by the Phalangist Party, at least 96% Christian.

Washington saw the PLO as defeated, militarily and politically, and thought it time to arrange a deal mutually satisfactory to the Israelis and the Arab reactionaries. On 1 September, Reagan came up with his 'plan', essentially warmed-up Camp David-cum-the-Alignment's 'Jordanian option' – the West Bank, excepting the old city, would become part of a confederation under the dictatorial Hussein. Begin's response was contemptuous: on 5 September he announced three new settlements would be set up on the West Bank. On 10 September the US Marines withdrew, with the French and Italians following on the 11th and 13th, despite the protests of the Lebanese Prime Minister, a Muslim, who insisted that one of the principal objectives of bringing in the multinational force was to provide protection for Palestinian and Lebanese civilians, and that the Americans had pledged that the troops would stay for 30 days. Certainly this was the high point of Begin's success. No doubt there was considerable erosion of Western public support for Israel, but that was a cheap enough price to pay for the defeat of the PLO and the establishment of a puppet state in Lebanon.

The Massacre and the Commission of Enquiry

On 14 September, an enormous explosion rocked the Phalangist headquarters and Gemayel was dead. Soon after, Begin told the US Ambassador that:

> our troops moved into the direction of West Beirut . . . We did it to make sure that certain possible events be prevented. We are afraid lest there be bloodshed . . . The Phalange commander escaped and is keeping control over the troops. He is a good man. We rely on him not to provoke incidents. But about the others, who knows?[39]

Sharon moved his army into West Beirut on 15 September and immediately asked these very same Phalangists to enter the Sabra and Shatila camps on the 16th. No one really knows how many were butchered there in the next two days, later Sharon was to admit to seven to eight hundred, and the PLO was to claim 2,000, but with one deft manoeuvre Begin and Sharon had nimbly snatched political defeat from the jaws of military victory.

What had happened? If we were to listen to Begin, the world, once again, was picking on the Jews: 'Goyim kill Goyim, and they come to hang the Jews.'[40] Accordingly, on 22 September, the Likud beat back a Knesset call for an inquiry, 48 to 42. But that same day the entire Arab population of Israel and the Occupied Territories went on general strike. On 25 September at least 400,000 people, mostly Jews – approximately 10% of the entire population of the country – poured into Tel Aviv for a rally organized by the Alignment and Peace Now. They demanded an inquiry and the resignation of both Begin and Sharon, but did not call for the withdrawal of the army from Lebanon. The demonstration was one of the largest anti-war rallies in modern times and official Washington, including some of the worst pro-Israeli demagogues in the Democratic Party, with the experience of both the Vietnam anti-war movement and Watergate behind them, pressured Begin to concede. On 28 September, he unwillingly appointed a Commission of Inquiry.

The next few months were a propaganda debacle for Zionism as the world press carried the testimony at the hearings. Finally, on 8 February 1983, the Commission, Chief Justice Kahan, Justice Barak and General (Reserves) Efrat, issued its findings:

> We have no doubt that no conspiracy or plot was entered into between anyone from the Israeli political echelon or from the military echelon in the IDF and the Phalangists, with the aim of perpetrating atrocities in the camps.

The Commissioners decided that Begin had not been directly told of the plan to send the Phalangists into the camps, and that he had only heard of it after they had already gone in, at a cabinet meeting on the evening of the 16th. But he had raised no objection to the idea, even after hearing 'the remarks of Deputy Prime Minister Levy, which contained a warning of the danger to be expected from the Phalangists' entry'.

The Commission refused to accept his defence of his unconcern: 'We are unable to accept the Prime Minister's remarks that he was absolutely unaware of such a danger.' The Commission concluded that: 'The Prime Minister's lack of involvement in the entire matter casts on him a certain degree of responsibility.'

Sharon became the scapegoat:

> In his testimony . . . the Minister of Defense also adopted the position that no one had imagined the Phalangists would carry out a massacre . . . But . . . it is impossible to justify the Minister of Defense's disregard of the danger. We will not repeat here what we . . . said above about the widespread knowledge regarding the Phalangists' combat ethics, their feelings of hatred toward the Palestinians and their leaders' plans for the future of the Palestinians when said leaders would assume power . . . no prophetic powers were required to know that concrete danger of acts of slaughter existed . . . From the Defense Minister himself we know that this consideration did not concern him in the least.

The Commission declared that:

> the Minister of Defense bears personal responsibility . . . it is fitting that the Minister . . . draw the appropriate personal conclusions . . . and if necessary . . . the Prime Minister consider whether he should exercise his authority . . . according to which 'the Prime Minister may . . . remove a minister from office'.[41]

Several others were censured: the then Foreign Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, did not pass on information given him that a massacre was going on, but the Commission did not call for his resignation. The Commission was very harsh on the Chief of Staff, Lt-General Rafael Eytan, but did not call for his resignation as he was about to retire. They called for the immediate dismissal of Yehoshua Saguy, the Director of Military Intelligence; they criticized Amir Drori, the head of the Northern Command for his 'absolutely passive role'; General Amos Yaron, the Beirut commander was condemned for failing to act immediately when he first heard of the atrocity reports on the first night of the carnage and they insisted on his being relieved of field duty for three years. The head of civilian intelligence, the Mossad, was criticized for not emphasizing his awareness of the unreliability of the Phalangists, but no action was recommended.[42]

Begin, of course, always personally rejected the Report in its entirety and, within the confines of the cabinet, threatened to resign if his ministers insisted on getting rid of Sharon.[43] But other ministers, and Washington, knew that some action had to be taken and Sharon became Minister without Portfolio. Begin remained still unrepentant: on 16 May 1983, he overruled his new Defence Minister, Moshe Arens, who, after legal advice, had turned down the proposed appointment of Yaron to be new head of manpower, with the promotion to Major General. Begin restored Yaron's appointment, but after Arens' action not even he dared to approve the promotion.[44]

The Commission could go no further than it did. To have said that the two leading figures in Israel's government wanted and expected a massacre – even if not of the full magnitude of the one that did in fact occur –

would have been tantamount to their declaring that Zionism had degenerated into a monstrosity, and members of such establishments never willingly admit that. But the evidence is there: even though they insisted that Begin had no prior knowledge of the murderers' entry into the camps, Begin, simultaneously denied prior knowledge and seemed quite willing to concede that he knew that they were going in:

> Barak: 'Did (Sharon) say anything about the role of the Phalangists?'
> Begin: 'Their role was clear: to fight terrorists . . .'
> Barak: 'According to what you are saying now, you knew on the Wednesday morning that the Phalangists were to fight?'
> Begin: 'If the Defense Minister told me – then I definitely knew.'
> Barak: 'No, he doesn't say he told you.'
> Begin: 'Well, if he didn't tell me, then I didn't know.'[45]

He let slip another reference to his guilty prior knowledge:

> Kahan: 'When was it first discussed with you, the question of what the Phalangist role would be . . .'
> Begin: 'This we learned of at the cabinet meeting . . .'
> . . .
> Barak: 'You held a number of discussions with the Chief of Staff and the Defense Minister as well. You did not ask . . . what the role of the Phalangists was?'
> Begin: 'What, which day?'
> . . .
> Barak: 'Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.'
> Begin: 'No, the question was not raised at all before us. Therefore I did not ask.'
> Barak: 'Did the assassination of Bashir Gemayel not bring you to think that maybe at this stage the Phalangists should not be called into action?'
> Begin: 'It did not even occur *to me*, Honored Judge, to think that the Phalangists, *if they were to enter the camps to fight the terrorists*, would commit such atrocities or massacre.'[46] (Author's emphasis.)

He told the Commissioners that he did not know that the Phalangists had been sent in until the cabinet meeting, an hour-and-a-half after they went in. But plainly, in this exchange, he was referring to his thoughts on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, prior to their entry, and prior to the cabinet meeting. Two highly competent journalists, David Landau, of the Zionist Jewish Telegraphic Agency's *Daily News Bulletin*, and David Shipler, the *New York Times* correspondent, both noted Begin's statements, but the Commission, ideologically predetermined to absolve any and all Israelis of wanting the Phalangists to kill Palestinians, chose to overlook the implications of his testimony on this score.[47]

Begin and Sharon were well aware of the history of the Phalange: *they*

had to expect an atrocity. On 15 September, the day before the massacre, the *New York Times* ran a dossier on the late Bashir and his movement:

> A trip to the 1936 Berlin Olympics impressed on his father (Pierre) the discipline of Hitler's Germany. The nationalistic and fascist movements of Francisco Franco and Benito Mussolini inspired the new party's ideology . . . During the (civil) war, he (Bashir) commanded the siege of the Palestinian refugee camp of Tel Zaatar . . . At the siege's end, the camp's survivors were killed by the Phalangist troops . . . In 1979, after Suleiman Franjieh, the former Maronite President of Lebanon, broke from the Christian alliance, Mr Gemayel's soldiers attacked Mr Franjieh's son and political heir, Tony. The raid left Tony and 32 supporters dead . . . In 1980, his Phalangist forces assaulted the beach resort of a Christian rival, Dany Chamoun. Bathers at Mr Chamoun's resort house were machine gunned in a swimming pool. Doctors later said that many bodies had been mutilated.[48]

There cannot be the slightest doubt that Sharon knew who he was dealing with. On 22 September, four days after the massacre, Sharon rose up to defend himself in the Knesset:

> I want to ask you, Shimon Peres . . . there was another affair . . . in Tel Zaatar [another camp, taken by the Phalangists in August 1976]. When you were Defense Minister. I will not go into details here. How come your conscience does not bother you? Thousands of people were slaughtered. And Parliament Member Peres, where were the officers of the IDF on that day, and that was an affair that occurred with foreknowledge.[49]

Begin and Sharon always wanted a bloodbath in Beirut: Begin told the Commission why Sharon did not have to tell him that the Phalangists were going into the camps:

> I would only like to say that back in a cabinet meeting on the 15th of June, there was a special discussion concerning the participation of the Lebanese Army and the Lebanese Forces . . . that they would occupy southwestern Beirut. We told them that the IDF was fighting, was sacrificing many lives, we have an interest in liquidating the terrorists.[50]

On 19 September, the day after the Phalangists left the camps, Shipler revealed the motivation behind the decision:

> The calculation was that the Phalangists, with old scores to settle and detailed information on the Palestinian fighters, would be more ruthless than the Israelis and probably more effective.[51]

On 4 October, *Time* magazine reported that 'On several occasions, [Bashir] Gemayel told Israeli officials he would like to raze the camps and

flatten them into tennis courts.'[52]

Readers will recall, even if Zionism's in-house Commission would not, that Begin had previously denied that a similar atrocity had been committed by his own Irgun at Dir Yassin in 1948. He had insisted that the charge was lying propaganda, but had taken solace in the fact that the net effect of the 'propaganda' was to drive hundreds of thousands of Palestinians out from what became Israel. The purpose of the invasion, as uncovered by *Israel and Palestine*, was to destroy the PLO's armed state-within-the-state and, as at Dir Yassin, to drive out the Palestinian civilian population. As both *Time* and the *New York Times* reported, Begin and Sharon knew in June, when they had already decided that the Phalange would be used to mop up the Palestinians, exactly what their leaders had in mind to do to the entire population of the camps. Begin wanted to drive out the Palestinians, exactly as his Irgun had driven these modern Canaanites before them in 1948.

The Commissioners, both in their examination of Begin and Sharon and in their final report, kept emphasizing that they should have known that Bashir's assassination would inspire the Phalange to seek revenge. While Begin and Sharon anticipated a massacre even as far back as June, there can not be the slightest doubt that the assassination reaffirmed their hopes in this regard. Kahan asked Sharon if,

> 'In contacts . . . with the leadership of the Phalangists, did you hear from them any plans about what would happen to the Palestinian population . . .'
> Sharon: 'In general my evaluation was that their aim was to create conditions that in the end the Palestinians would leave Lebanon . . . Amin [Gemayel] himself, to the best of my memory, at the funeral on September 15, used the word revenge. The word revenge also appeared, I would say, in discussions that we had. The word revenge appeared there.'[53]

> Kahan: 'Was an apprehension raised of acts of revenge or massacre of the civilian population by the Phalangists?'
> Sharon: 'No, no. But I would like to say . . . Whoever thinks that in fighting in built-up areas . . . civilians are not killed, then he is mistaken . . .
> Kahan: 'What is meant, of course, is . . . rather their intentional killing.
> Sharon: 'Yes . . . I don't think that anyone thought that the Lebanese Forces would act as we would. I didn't think that the Lebanese Forces would act as we would.'[54]

The Commission took much secret testimony, and when they issued their report they annexed to it a secret appendix for the cabinet's eyes only. On 21 February, *Time* reported that:

> it has learned that it [Appendix B] also contains further details about Sharon's visit to the Gemayel family on the day after Bashir Gemayel's assassination. Sharon reportedly told the Gemayels that Israel's army

would be moving into West Beirut and that he expected the Christian forces to go into the Palestinian refugee camps. Sharon also discussed with the Gemayels the need for the Phalangists to take revenge for the assassination of Bashir, but the details of the conversation are not known.[55]

Subsequently Sharon has sued *Time* for libel, denying that the report said any such thing. Naturally the present writer is not privy to the secret appendix, but it is quite apparent, from the public evidence, that, whether or not he told Amin Gemayel to kill Palestinian civilians, it is evident from his testimony about Amin's call for revenge at Bashir's funeral that he realized the slaughter of Palestinian males was likely to take place:

> I would like to say a word with the permission of the members of the committee on the subject of revenge, as I know it among the Arabs. Revenge as acceptable among Arabs does not include children, women and the elderly. There are certainly Arabists who are more expert than myself, yes, I say this even in light of my experience. Revenge exists, without any doubt. Without any doubt, revenge does exist.[56]

Others in the upper echelons of the Israeli army were also aware that the Phalangists would commit an atrocity. The Chief of Staff, General Rafael Eytan, told the cabinet on the evening of 16 September that: 'I see it in their eyes . . . what they're waiting for . . . Amin [Gemayel] has already spoken of revenge and all of them are sharpening their blades.'[57]

Begin treated the Commission to the same kind of doubletalk as Sharon. They wanted to know why, given his own remarks to Ambassador Draper, he did not think that the Phalangists would commit murder:

> Begin: 'Honored Judge, I can only repeat my previous statement, that in those days, it did not occur *to any of us* that the Phalangists that were brought into these two camps would not fight the terrorists. They entered in order to fight the terrorists and the terrorists only.' (Author's emphasis.)
> Efrat: 'Was the problem not discussed, were there no doubts raised, concerning their intentions of solving the Palestinian problem in the area of Beirut, in a certain way, of their heavy feelings towards this group, and the attempt to get rid of them?'
> Begin: 'No, sir. It did not even occur to us.'[58]

Kahan pressed him as to the discussion of potential atrocities at the cabinet meeting on the 16th, i.e. while the massacre was already underway. The Deputy Prime Minister, David Levy, had warned that atrocities were liable to occur, and then the Israelis would be blamed for not taking precautions:

> Begin: 'He expressed very serious misgivings but even Minister Levy did not request a discussion or decision not to have the Phalangists enter or to take them out . . .'

> Barak: 'But should not the words of Minister Levy have at that stage brought you to think: One moment, the Phalangists are inside, vengeance, murder, bloodshed, let's stop them?'
> Begin: 'Honored Judge, the fact is that it did not occur to anyone, that they would commit atrocities. Just as I have already claimed. Simply none of us presumed this, no Minister, no other participant. Minister Levy, as I pointed out, did mention hypothetically what was liable to happen, but neither did he request, let's say, to deal with this question in a discussion or to decision or vote, he did not demand this.'
> Efrat: 'The Chief of Staff, at this meeting, he also referred to this topic. I am of course not quoting him exactly, but he referred to the matter, and he said . . . Already today Druse have been killed there, it will be an outburst the likes of which have not been seen, I already see in their eyes what they are waiting for, etc. . . .'
> Begin: 'I can only determine the fact that none of the ministers [said this], the way it was said here, in none of the meetings, no red light was lit on the basis of these things.'[59]

Before issuing their report, the Commissioners decided that they would give all those who might be 'harmed' by an adverse verdict a chance to testify again or cross-examine witnesses. Begin refused to appear, but sent in a detailed defence of himself and the decision to send in the murderers:

> According to the authoritative information that was in our possession . . . the terrorists . . . left behind them some 2,000 armed, equipped and organized terrorists, who were concentrated mainly in the 'camps' of Sabra, Shatila and Fakhani. The task of the Lebanese Forces was to fight these terrorists.[60]

However, it was immediately pointed out by David Shipler in the 10 December *New York Times*, that Sharon had testified that the Phalangist force numbered no more than 100 to 200 men.[61] Clearly, even 200 would have been far too few *if* they were really expected to fight 2,000 desperate and well-armed terrorists. What is more, if the Israelis genuinely anticipated the Phalangists encountering substantial enemy forces, they would have sent along an IDF liaison team, to communicate in Hebrew with the Israeli army in the event of any difficulty. The Commissioners said that a decision to send the Phalangists in might have been justified if the IDF had taken all possible steps to prevent harm to the civilian population. Again and again they commented that they could not understand why none of the generals involved had anticipated an atrocity. In reality Sharon was careful to be sure that no Israeli entered the camps, precisely because they knew that civilians were going to be killed, and they were preparing their alibi: they saw nothing and they thought the Phalangists were only battling terrorists.

'Whom the Gods would destroy, they first make mad.' The Commission could not grasp that the logic of war criminals is not the logic of rational beings. Rational beings do not tell the US Ambassador that they are going to introject their army between the enraged Phalangists and their enemies, and then let them loose, unobserved, upon those very enemies, knowing that they lusted for revenge. But likewise fanatically committed to terror, Begin and Sharon had become adepts at inventing lying excuses and alibis. They wanted to drive the 'two-legged animals' out of West Beirut, but world opinion had compelled them to stay out of the sector. Bashir's assassination, and the need to 'protect' the Muslims and Palestinians, suddenly provided them with the pretext to go in. But they had always understood that their own army could not be counted on to be sufficiently ruthless to do the necessary job – there were too many Peace Now elements in the military. But, plainly, anyone could understand that '2,000 terrorists' justified bringing in the Phalange. Fighting in 'built-up areas' was going to do for an excuse for the killing of civilians. Here they made their egregious miscalculation: they wanted a slaughter, but not as many as were in fact butchered. Just enough – 'the punishment to the few, the fear to the many' – to drive out the rest.

Levy had warned them that, if a massacre took place, it was they who would be blamed for not anticipating it. But both of these profound democrats had a ready answer to that: he had not asked for a vote on the question, so how could they have possibly been at fault? Presumably modesty prevented them from nominating each other for the Nobel Peace Prize.

That the Commission did not find the two guilty of premeditated murder tells us more about the general level of Zionist morality than about Begin and Sharon or Sabra and Shatila. For the world to go with the Commission, we must all believe that Israel was guided by not one but two incompetents who lacked the wits given to Israeli journalists and others who, as the Commission said,

> warned – as soon as they learned of the Phalangists' entry into the camps, and on earlier occasions when the Phalangists' role in the war was discussed – that the danger of a massacre was great.[62]

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15. Yitzhak Shamir Takes Over

Begin Resigns

On 30 August 1983 Begin told his colleagues that he could not continue as Prime Minister. He gave no explanation for his decision, but the real reason soon emerged: the previous November he had gone ahead with a visit to the US, despite his wife's hospitalization with emphysema, and took their personal physician with him. While he was in America, his wife died, and Begin blamed himself for taking their doctor away from her.[1] By June 1983, his gaunt, vacant look had drawn comment from David Shipler in the *Times*.[2] Later, after Begin's announcement, Phepard Kanter, a professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia University, diagnosed his ailment from afar, in a letter to the *Jerusalem Post*:

> . . . an extremely common condition which in the past has been called Involutional Melancholia and is currently referred to as Endogenous Depression. Often coming on late in life and especially likely to be devastating after the death of a beloved spouse . . . this type of depression can be cured within three weeks with antidepressant medication, the success rate being approximately 80 per cent, or within two weeks with electroshock therapy, the success rate being approximately 95 per cent.[3]

Months later, however, Begin was obviously still in the grip of his malady, and his staff's talk of a skin ailment keeping him from appearing in public was no more than harmless lies, designed to protect his reputation.

It seems that the only people who failed to grasp that they were dealing with a sick man were the leaders of his coalition, who saw him as holding their squabbling government together by dint of his charisma, and who desperately urged him to remain. In the end, the Herut Party chose as his successor, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, in preference to David Levy, in a contest in which neither ethnicity (Levy is a Moroccan) nor ideology played a decisive role. A majority of the Party Centre that picked Shamir (436–302) was Oriental, but their 'Sephardism' has no democratic content; real power for the Oriental Jewish working class awaits the downfall of Zionism. Their present plebian rage at their former

masters, the Ashkenazi labour bureaucrats, had gone no further than backing Begin, another Ashkenazi, and now about half of the Oriental delegates at the meeting followed the advice of the most popular of all politicians among the Oriental stall-holders in the public market – the Ashkenazi Sharon – and they shouted themselves hoarse cheering for yet another graduate of Polish Betar.

The public and the pundits agreed that the new regime was a weak one, with an immediate poll showing that an Alignment list with former President Yitzhak Navon heading it would have beaten a Likud slate topped by Shamir.[4] Two of Begin's leading spokesmen, Uri Porat and Ehud Olmert, predicted a short stay in office for his successor, with Porat predicting 'six weeks, maybe,' and Olmert guessing 'thirty days'.[5] That Shamir lasted longer is attributable to the Alignment's unwillingness to replace him, as they knew that they, like him, had no solution to the incredible economic problems that he inherited.

Shamir's Background

The new Prime Minister was born Yitzhak Yzernitzky, in Rozeny, in what is now Byelorussia, in 1915. His father had founded a Hebrew school in the little shtetl and from his earliest years he was fluent in Hebrew. He attended the Bialystock Hebrew Gymnasium and then went on to the University of Warsaw law school. Already a Betari, he arrived in Palestine in 1935, where he enrolled at the Hebrew University. However, he soon abandoned the law for the Irgun, supporting himself by occasional construction work. With the 1936 Arab revolt he became an instructor in the 'national cells', a Revisionist youth movement, and was militarily involved in the Tel Aviv region. Little is known of his Irgun career, but one incident stands out. In 1938 Yzernitzky and a 15-year-old recruit, Eliyahu Bet Zouri, tried to blow up a WZO defence fund collection booth which levied a toll on Jewish travellers leaving Tel Aviv. They planted a crude gunpowder bomb which went off prematurely, severely burning Bet Zouri's legs and scorching the face of Israel's future Prime Minister.[6] But this bizarre incident was a mere nothing compared to his career as a leading figure in the 'Stern Gang'.

The Maddest of the Mad

When Jabotinsky abandoned their terrorist campaign, the British released the Irgun's commander, David Raziel, but they kept Avraham Stern and most of the Irgun's High Command in gaol until June 1940. Stern believed that a one-sided 'truce' was a surrender and he held out for a formal pact with the British, something London never even considered. A majority of the Irgun's leaders and its ranks supported his position and

he was able to pressure Raziel into resigning.[7] Six days before he died on 3 August, however, Jabotinsky reappointed Raziel, and by September Stern, now to be known as Yair – the Illuminator – after Eleazer ben Yair, the commander of the Zealots at Masada during the Jewish revolt against Rome in AD70, left 'the National Military Organization in the Land of Israel' to form his own 'National Military Organization in Israel'.

Stern, born in Suwalki, Poland, in 1907, had emigrated to Palestine in 1925 and in the late 1920s went to Florence on a scholarship, returning to Palestine in the early 1930s as a Fascist. By the late 1930s he concluded that the underground Irgun should not be tied to an above ground political movement that sought to work within the confines of Mandate legality. He had also come to see the incongruity of a fascist movement with a 'Gladstonian liberal' at its head. Because of his understanding that Zionism was financially dependent on the charity of the Jewish bourgeoisie, Jabotinsky would not stoop to the plebian social demagoguery characteristic of classic fascisms, but Stern had no such scruple. According to his disciple Nathan Yalin-Mor, Stern was 'not a socialist, but he vigorously objected to the anti-socialist rhetoric of the Revisionists.'[8] That the Duce had turned towards Hitler did not disturb Stern. During the salad days of Italian patronage, the hard-core Revisionist fascists had become so committed to Mussolini that they invented a concatinated explanation for their hero's betrayal. An American Revisionist organ announced that it really was the Jews that were to blame. After all,

> For years we have warned the Jews not to insult the fascist regime in Italy. Let us be frank before we accuse others of the recent anti-Jewish laws in Italy; why not first accuse our own radical groups who are responsible for what happened.[9]

Once out of the Revisionist camp, Stern-Yair's mind ran riot. His manifesto, *Ikarei ha Tehiyyah* (*The Principles of Revival*), defined their objectives: the Jewish people as the Chosen People were fully entitled to the entire Biblical patrimony as laid down in Genesis 15:18 – everything from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates. There was to be 'an exchange of population', ie, the forced expulsion of the Palestinians, and the building of the Third Temple.[10] Firmly convinced that the Axis were going to win the war, Stern contacted Italy's local agent, an Irgunist.[11] This man, however, worked simultaneously for the British CID, and Stern suspected that he was a double agent.[12] To be certain that they were in fact dealing with the Axis, the Sternists sent Naphtali Lubinczik to Vichy-controlled Beirut where, in January 1941, he met two Germans, Alfred Roser, a Military Intelligence agent, and Werner Otto von Hentig of the Foreign Office. On 11 January 1941 they sent the Sternists' memorandum proposing collaboration to their embassy in Ankara, where it was found after the war.[13] As the document, entitled *Fundamental Features of the Proposal of the National Military Organization In Palestine (Irgun*

Zvai Leumi) Concerning the Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe and the Participation of the NMO in the War on the Side of Germany, places Shamir in the starkest historic perspective, it is obligatory to cite it in full:

> It is often stated in the speeches and utterances of the leading statesmen of National Socialist Germany that a prerequisite of the New Order in Europe requires the radical solution of the Jewish question through evacuation ('Jew-free Europe').
>
> The evacuation of the Jewish masses from Europe is a precondition for solving the Jewish question; but this can only be made possible and complete through the settlement of these masses in the home of the Jewish people, Palestine, and through the establishment of a Jewish state in its historic boundaries.
>
> The solving in this manner of the Jewish problem, thus bringing with it once and for all the liberation of the Jewish people, is the objective of the political activity and the years-long struggle of the Israeli freedom movement, the National Military Organization (Irgun Zvai Leumi) in Palestine.
>
> The NMO, which is well-acquainted with the goodwill of the German Reich government and its authorities towards Zionist activity inside Germany and towards Zionist emigration plans, is of the opinion that:
>
> 1. Common interests could exist between the establishment of a new order in Europe in conformity with the German concept, and the true national aspirations of the Jewish people as they are embodied by the NMO.
>
> 2. Cooperation between the new Germany and a renewed folkish-national Hebraium would be possible and,
>
> 3. The establishment of the historic Jewish state on a national and totalitarian basis, bound by a treaty with the German Reich, would be in the interest of a maintained and strengthened future German position of power in the Near East.
>
> Proceeding from these considerations, the NMO in Palestine, under the condition the abovementioned national aspirations of the Israeli freedom movement are recognized on the side of the German Reich, offers to actively take part in the war on Germany's side.
>
> This offer by the NMO, covering activity in the military, political and information fields, in Palestine and, according to our determined preparations, outside Palestine, would be connected to the military training and organizing of Jewish manpower in Europe, under the leadership and command of the NMO. These military units would take part in the fight to conquer Palestine, should such a front be decided upon.
>
> The indirect participation of the Israeli freedom movement in the New Order in Europe, already in the preparatory stage, would be linked with a positive-radical solution of the European Jewish problem in conformity with the abovementioned national aspirations of the Jewish people. This would extraordinarily strengthen the moral basis of the New Order in the eyes of all humanity.

The cooperation of the Israeli freedom movement would also be along the lines of one of the last speeches of the German Reich Chancellor, in which Herr Hitler emphasized that he would utilize every combination and coalition in order to isolate and defeat England.

A brief general view of the formation, essence, and activity of the NMO in Palestine:

The NMO developed partly out of the Jewish self-defence in Palestine and the Revisionist movement (New Zionist Organization), with which the NMO was loosely connected through the person of Mr V Jabotinsky until his death.

The pro-English attitude of the Revisionist Organization in Palestine, which prevented the renewal of the personal union, led in the autumn of this year to a complete break between it and the NMO as well as to a thereupon following split in the Revisionist movement.

The goal of the NMO is the establishment of the Jewish state within its historic borders.

The NMO, in contrast to all Zionist trends, rejects colonizatory infiltration as the only means of making accessible and gradually taking possession of the fatherland and practices its slogan, the struggle and the sacrifice, as the only true means for the conquest and liberation of Palestine.

On account of its militant character and its anti-English disposition the NMO is forced, under constant persecutions by the English administration, to exercise its political activity and the military training of its members in Palestine in secret.

The NMO, whose terrorist activities began as early as the autumn of the year 1936, became, after the publication of the British White Papers, especially prominent in the summer of 1939 through successful intensification of its terroristic activity and sabotage of English property. At that time these activities, as well as daily secret radio broadcasts, were noticed and discussed by virtually the entire world press.

The NMO maintained independent political offices in Warsaw, Paris, London and New York until the beginning of the war.

The office in Warsaw was mainly concerned with the military organization and training of the national Zionist youth and was closely connected with the Jewish masses who, especially in Poland, sustained and enthusiastically supported, in every manner, the fight of the NMO in Palestine. Two newspapers were published in Warsaw (*The Deed* and *Liberated Jerusalem*): these were organs of the NMO.

The office in Warsaw maintained close relations with the former Polish government and those military circles, who brought greatest sympathy and understanding towards the aims of the NMO. Thus, in the year 1939 selected groups of NMO members were sent from Palestine to Poland, where their military training was completed in barracks by Polish officers.

The negotiations, for the purpose of activating and concretizing their aid, took place between the NMO and the Polish government in Warsaw – the evidence of which can easily be found in the archives of the former

> Polish government – were terminated because of the beginning of the war.
>
> The NMO is closely related to the totalitarian movements of Europe in its ideology and structure.
>
> The fighting capacity of the NMO could never be paralyzed or seriously weakened, neither through strong defensive measures by the English administration and the Arabs, nor by those of the Jewish socialists.[14]

Lubinczik told the Nazis that if the Germans thought a Zionist state would be politically inexpedient, the Sternists would agree to the 'Madagascar plan', ie the deportation of European Jewry to the island of Madagascar, under German domination. The Sternists believed this to be consistent with Herzl's initial acceptance of Uganda as a temporary colony.[15] Jewish emigration to Madagascar had been one of the more fantastic 'solutions' to the Jewish question discussed by Europe's anti-Semites prior to the war, and in 1940 the Hitlerites had spoken of a Jewish 'settlement' there as a component of their projected African empire.

The Germans told Lubinczik that Arab sensibilities would have to take priority, and Berlin showed no further interest in the treacherous Zionists.[16] This, however, did not deter the Sternists. The Vichyites having been defeated in Lebanon-Syria in July 1941, Nathan Yalin-Mor sought to reach the Nazis again in neutral Turkey, but was arrested en route, in Syria, in December 1941, by the British.[17]

What was – and is – Shamir's attitude towards all of this? Nicholas Bethell interviewed him for his 1979 book, *The Palestine Triangle*. Shamir told him that he had been:

> against making approaches to Italy. I didn't think it would do any good. But Stern had good memories of his work in Poland before the war. He had got many Jews to Palestine by exploiting the anti-Semitism of Polish officials. He thought it might work in Italy. At least he felt he had to try.[18]

In October 1983, after he took office as Prime Minister, Shamir was interviewed by the Israeli daily *Yediot Ahronot*. At least this time the Nazis came into the discussion:

> There was a plan to turn to Italy for help and to make contact with Germany on the assumption that these could bring about a massive Jewish immigration. I opposed this, but I did join Lehi after the idea of contacts with the Axis countries was dropped.[19]

Even if we were to take his new tale as gospel, was not the Prime Minister of Israel nevertheless confessing that he had knowingly joined a pro-Nazi organization? But he was lying. There is evidence that he had been an early follower of Stern. Gerold Frank, in his 1963 book *The Deed*, a study of the Sternists' later assassination of Lord Moyne, wrote, three times, of a meeting, 'in the days immediately following the Raziel-

Stern split', where Yzernitzky tried to recruit the still undecided youths of the Irgun to Stern's faction: ' "Men!" his deep voice rumbled. "If you want to smell fire and powder, come with us!" '[20] Additionally, Shamir conveniently 'forgets' that there were two attempts to ally with the Hitlerites, and there is no doubt that Shamir was a prominent member of the organization before Yalin-Mor made his unsuccessful effort to teach the Germans again in Turkey.

Although today Shamir denies that he was even a member when the Sternists tried to link up with the arch-enemy of the Jews, few can be expected to believe the crude official lie. Therefore, we will be told, unofficially, of course, that while the proposal was crackpot – the notions that Hitler might have armed the Jews, or that the Jews would have fought on his side, rank among the most grotesque productions ever concocted by the human mind – nevertheless it was made before the slaughter of the Jews had commenced, and was made only in the hope of saving Jewish lives. As we have seen, however, Stern had been in Poland in the years immediately prior to the war, and had done nothing to mobilize Polish Jews against the anti-Semites there, and Nathan Yalin-Mor and Israel Scheib (Eldad) had fled before the German Army to Lithuania, and then made no attempt to return to Poland to organize the underground resistance. The Sternists had always thought that anti-Semitism was justified and inevitable and could never be fought. They were firmly convinced that Nazism was the wave of the future. As Zionists, they believed that ' 'tis indeed an ill-wind that blows no one any good', and they sought to put Nazism's wind in their sails. They tried to justify their singular position in a series of illegal radio broadcasts:

> There is a difference between a persecutor and an enemy. Persecutors have risen against Israel in all generations and in all periods of our diaspora, starting with Haman and ending with Hitler . . . The source of all our woes is our remaining in exile, and the absence of a homeland and statehood. Therefore, our enemy is the foreigner, the ruler of our land who blocks the return of the people to it. The enemy are the British who conquered the land with our help and who remain here by our leave, and who betrayed us and placed our brethren in Europe in the hands of the persecutor.[21]

Shamir still approves of the Revisionists' dealings with the Polish anti-Semites, and told Bethell that 'It was a political agreement. They helped us for anti-Semitic reasons. We explained to them, "If you want to get rid of the Jews, you must help the Zionist movement." '[22] Shamir today pretends he was not fully involved in the Stern Gang's pro-Nazi orientation, but we are fully entitled to conclude that his contemporary attitude towards collusion with the Colonels likewise reflects his thinking then, concerning collaboration with the Nazis.

Given Revisionism's pre-war links with Mussolini, and the declared Fascism of many of its leaders as well as its ranks, we must likewise accept

the Sternists at their word when they told the Nazis that they were totalitarians. It was his Fascist nationalism and his conviction that anti-Semitism was, likewise, a legitimate form of nationalism for gentiles, that led Yzernitzky to approve of the would-be pact with the Devil.

Stern is Killed

The new group rapidly lost most of its following as the ranks began to perceive where Stern was leading them, and they either returned to the Irgun or joined the British Army. The diehards only increased their intense isolation by funding themselves by robbing Zionist banks and extorting money from individuals.[23] Their anti-British activities in that period amounted to little more than a bomb at an immigration office in Haifa in protest against the deportation of illegal immigrants to Mauritius, some postering, and desperate gun battles with the CID as, aided by tips from both the Haganah and the Irgun, it closed in on them. In 1941, many of their cadres were arrested, including Yzernitzky. On 9 January 1942 the robbery of a Histadrut bank resulted in the murder of two clerks, and the British rounded up two prime suspects. In revenge the Sternists set a trap for the CID. On 20 January, what seemed to be an explosive mishap at one of their bomb factories brought the CID to the site, where another bomb killed two inspectors and wounded two others. Naturally this only made the CID redouble its efforts, and most of what was left of the organization was soon either rounded up or killed outright. Increasingly, Stern was turned away by sympathizers as he tried to hide. Having no other choice, he took refuge in the apartment of a comrade who had previously been arrested. On 12 February the CID raided the place, found him in a closet, and murdered him.[24]

The Further Path of Terror

Those of Stern's followers who were still free were consumed with a desire for revenge against the police and on 22 April an inspector's car was booby-trapped and on 1 May another policeman's car narrowly escaped being blown up by an electric mine. These incidents were, however, their last gasp efforts, and then the organization virtually collapsed. It was the 1 September 1942 escape of Yzernitsky and Eliyahu Giladi from the Mizra Detention Camp near Acre that marks the rebirth of the movement, now to be renamed *Lohamei Herut Yisrael* (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel) or *Lehi* for short.[25]

Yzernitzky was slowly re-establishing contact with the scattered survivors when he concluded that Giladi had become a menace to the security of the group. The latter had decided that they had to embark on a campaign of assassinating leaders of the WZO, including Ben-Gurion,

and he threatened to purge those within their ranks who opposed his scheme. Yzernitzky, acting on his own, ordered him to be killed without an internal trial, only afterwards assembling some of the group and offering to stand trial himself, then and there, if they disapproved of what he had done. Needless to say, they accepted his version of the affair.[26]

In the summer of 1943, Nathan Yalin-Mor sent an article out of his detention camp at Latrun, proclaiming that imprisonment was an unmitigated disaster for an underground fighter. Henceforward, any Lehi member caught in a dragnet was forbidden to discard his weapon in an effort to evade arrest. The order was 'Kill, be killed, but no prison!'[27] The 'rational' defence of the new command was the knowledge that they might get shot would make the police more hesitant to cordon a street off merely for a routine identity search, but in practice it led only to the deaths of a few more Sternists and police, while it only reinforced the public's image of them as the ultimate desperadoes. They only effected an 'internal disarmament' after Passover 1944, when Begin, then heading the Irgun, met Yzernitzky and convinced him that the policy interfered with planning 'if at any moment there may be unplanned incidents between one or more underground men and enemy forces.'[28]

During the night of 31 October–1 November 1943, Yalin-Mor and 19 other Sternists tunnelled their way out of Latrun and soon a triumvirate took charge of the FFI: Yalin-Mor and Scheib (Eldad) as their propagandists, and Yzernitzky as Operations Commander. Scheib (Eldad) was a right-wing mystic, capable of little more than rhetorical bombast, and it was Yalin-Mor who provided their distinctive political theorizing. The news of the Holocaust had made it psychologically impossible for them, as Jews, to continue as a Fascist,.pro-Nazi tendency, but Yalin-Mor retained and developed Stern's demagoguery. Now the FFI saw two more potential allies: the Soviets, who Yalin-Mor understood would revert to an anti-British posture after the war; and the Arabs. While still proclaiming their goal of a Zionist state from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, they now insisted that they were part of a broader anti-imperialist front in the Middle East.

Their new line provided much of the public rationale behind their 6 November 1944 Cairo assassination of Walter Guinness, Lord Moyne, Churchill's Minister Resident in the Middle East. The youthful assassinations were Eliyahu Hakim and Eliyahu Bet Zouri, but the organizer was a full bearded Chassid in Tel Aviv: rabbi Dov Shamir.[29] Shamir still defends the assassination. Moyne

> . . . was Colonial Secretary when the unfortunate immigrant ship, the *Struma*, reached Istanbul, and he was the one who pressured the Turks into pushing it back out into the Black Sea . . . He was the one who asked, when there was a chance of saving one million Jews from the Nazi Holocaust: 'What will I do with them?'[30]

However, as far back as 1940, Stern wrote to the Nazis to tell them of their military activities which, 'according to our determined preparations', would spread 'outside Palestine'. When, in 1941, Yalin-Mor arrived in Palestine, Stern told him of his ambition to assassinate the Minister Resident in Egypt, as an illustration that their fight was not merely against the British presence in Palestine, but against the Empire as such. But when London appointed an Australian as the Resident, the plan had to be temporarily shelved, as the murder of an Australian would not be understood. The assignment of the former Colonial Secretary to the post, in 1944, revived the plan.[31]

In 1944, Zionism in Palestine was not of major interest for Egyptians who were still preoccupied with the British domination of their own country, and there was a natural sympathy for the two youths who had killed the representatives of the hated foreigners, and local illusions were only reinforced when Bet Zouri insisted that they were not Zionists.[32]

Although Moyne's role in denying Palestine as a refuge to the Jews of Europe is Shamir's pretext for the slaying, the assassination did nothing to help the still surviving Jews in Nazi-occupied territory, and it alienated much of the British public and governmental opinion from the Zionist cause, and proved the issue that permitted the Haganah to openly collaborate with the CID to suppress the Irgun.[33] (See chapter 11.) In fact, the FFI was forced to curtail its activities, in a deal with the Haganah.[34] Begin, whose men were being hounded by the Haganah, relates that:

> Our men were amazed to see active FFI members walking unconcerned in the streets of Tel Aviv. The riddle was solved later when the united Resistance Movement was formed. I was then told that in November 1944, the FFI promised Golomb (of the Haganah) that they would suspend operations against the British and consequently Haganah did not touch the FFI during that period.[35]

The Stern Gang's New Respectability

The deal with the Haganah blossomed into the short-lived post-war Tnuat HaMeri, which suddenly gave the previously despised Fascists and terrorists of the Stern Gang a new respectability in Zionist eyes, but the alliance fell apart in the wake of the King David Hotel bombing, which also, indirectly, proved to be the undoing of rabbi Shamir. The British Army had concluded that the Irgun had organized the bombing of the Jerusalem Hotel from Tel Aviv and, in early August 1946, imposed a curfew on the city. Shamir, although disguised in a full black beard, black felt hat and long kaftan, was picked up in a street round-up and spotted by a detective who recognized him by his bushy eyebrows.[36] Two weeks later he was flown to imprisonment in Asmara in Eritrea. He and several Irgunists tunnelled out of their prison on 14 January 1947 and, after a

stifling journey in a concealed comparment in a petrol lorry, he arrived in Addis Ababa. From there he managed to get to Djibouti in French Somaliland, where he was again gaoled. The Irgun's representative in France, however, convinced Prime Minister Robert Schumann, who was anti-British in response to London's successful effort to push France out of the Levant, to order the transport of Shamir and another escapee, an Irgunist, on a French naval vessel, and he arrived in France in early 1948 and was granted asylum.[37] He arrived in the new Israeli state in May.

Yalin-Mor's propaganda had given the Sternists an anti-imperialist image, not merely to several hundred Jewish youths in Palestine, but also abroad. He told the world press that:

> We are for a truly democratic, as well as free and independent Palestine. We are opposed to every kind of exploitation. We are not anti-socialist. We believe in a strong state encouraged by co-operative methods. The majority of the Jewish people in Palestine are workers – we believe they will govern the country well.[38]

The majority of the movement's leaders were, however, still rightists who saw such rhetoric as a sly tactic.[39] Such militarist currents are notorious for their lack of ideological clarity, their ranks really do not care what is said in their name, as long as they are allowed to play with their bombs.

There was at least one meeting with Meir Vilner of the Communist Party of Palestine.[40] However, when the Soviet Union came out in favour of the UN partition plan of 1947, the Sternists denounced partition as a denial of the Jews' right to all of Eretz Yisrael on both sides of the Jordan. All notions of the FFI as a progressive tendency utterly vanished with their participation in the carnage at Dir Yassin. (See chapter 12.)

The Assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte

With the establishment of the Zionist state, the FFI dissolved itself within Israel proper, and its supporters joined the IDF, but, like the Irgun, it continued to maintain an independent existence in Jerusalem. It was the 17 September 1948 assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte, the UN Special Mediator for Palestine, that caused the FFI to self-destruct. For months their press had been ranting against Bernadotte, and when a completely unknown organization, *Hazit HaMoledeth* (Fatherland Front), took credit for the slaying, everyone understood that it was the Stern Gang that actually did it.

The murder was instantly perceived by the entire world as a crime, and the Ben-Gurion regime outlawed the FFI and arrested Yalin-Mor and other members of the group, with Shamir being forced to go into hiding. Naturally, most of the organizers have since been reluctant to fully

describe the plot. The identity of the immediate perpetrator, Yehoshua Cohen, was, however, discovered many years later, and he confessed the crime to Ben-Gurion, who had become – and remained – his close friend.[41] The Israeli prosecutors decided that there was not enough evidence to directly link Yalin-Mor to the act, and preferred to try him and Matityahu Shmulewitz under the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance, before a military court, as the ringleaders of a terrorist organization.[42] Yalin-Mor denounced Bernadotte before the tribunal: 'He stood in the way of Jewish absorption of the Kingdom of Trans-Jordan, as well as the whole of Palestine.'[43] Yalin-Mor was sentenced to eight years and Shmulewitz to five years imprisonment. Yalin-Mor, however, had run in the 25 January 1949 election for the first Knesset on the Fighters' Party list, had won a seat, and was amnestied on 14 February along with all those still in detention.[44] Shamir was able to come out of hiding.

Was Shamir one of the organizers of the murder? Thirty-four years later, he refused to grant an interview to Dr Amitsur Ilan, who was researching the affair, but, basing himself on published sources and other, successful, interviews, Ilan concluded that Shamir was the prime mover behind the deed.[45] Ilan's verdict is the general opinion of those who have written on the subject, as with Benny Morris, who wrote the *Jerusalem Post*'s background article on the soon-to-be Prime Minister: 'He is generally believed to have been responsible for planning the . . . murder of the UN mediator for Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte in September 1948.'[46]

Shamir stayed with the short-lived Fighters' Party while it lasted, but it immediately started disintegrating, with the ultra-rightists walking out in 1950. Yalin-Mor did not run again in the 1951 elections and the Party vanished from the scene. Shamir and Yalin-Mor set themselves up in business that that soon failed. Shamir then managed a cinema house chain, and then tried his hand at setting up a construction firm in the Negev.[47]

From Underground Terrorist to State Terrorist

In 1955, the Labour government recruited the erstwhile organizer of assassinations into the Mossad. Naturally his career in the Zionist secret police is shrouded in obscurity. *Who's Who in Israel – 1978*, in conformity with its standard practice concerning such operatives, merely listed him as having joined the civil service in a 'senior post'.[48] He was reported to have been a top aide to the then head of the Mossad, Isser Harel, and to have organized several operations against German scientists in Egypt.[49] We are allowed to conjecture as to whether he had some connection with the letter bombs they received. It has also been reported that he was head of the Mossad's European bureaux when he retired in 1965.[50]

After his retirement, Shamir became a small businessman and then a manager of various concerns, in the late 1960s managing a small rubber factory in Kfar Sava.[51] He became active in the 'Soviet Jewry' movement, joined the Herut Party in 1970, and was made head of its new immigrant department. But whatever Begin may have thought of him in those days, when he first ran for the Knesset, in December 1973, he was only number 27 on the Herut list.[52]

Although there was nothing to distinguish his work within the Knesset, once in the parliament, his rise was rapid and in 1975 he was elected party chairman. In 1977, after the Likud triumph, he became Speaker of the Knesset. Always the hard liner, he abstained in the September 1978 vote on the Camp David agreement, and in March 1979 he abstained on the Egyptian peace treaty. He believed that Sadat only wanted to regain Egyptian territory before reverting to a rejectionist stance.[53]

In March 1980 he succeeded Moshe Dayan as Foreign Minister, after Dayan concluded that Begin was simply deceiving Carter regarding implementing even the inadequate 'autonomy' called for under the Camp David accord. That he retains his time honoured ability to fantasize became glaringly apparent in his new post, as with his 5 October 1981 speech before the ultra-conservative Foreign Policy Association in New York:

> Public opinion in the West is being exposed to loud clamors in support of the Palestinian cause . . . Arab propaganda is calling for a homeland, as they put it, for the homeless Palestinians . . . It is important to understand the 'Jordan is Palestine' aspect and that the conflict is not, and never was, between Israel and a stateless people. Once this is understood, the emotional dimension that evokes problems of conscience in some minds will be removed. If it is perceived in this light, you have on the one hand a Palestinian-Jordanian Arab state, and Israel on the other, then the problem is reduced to a territorial conflict between these two states. The conflict will then have been reduced to its true and manageable proportions.[54]

The Massacre

As a member of the cabinet, Shamir bears full responsibility for every aspect of the invasion of Lebanon and the ensuing massacre, but he was singled out by the Kahan Commission for an individual dollop of blame:

> The Foreign Minister, Mr Yitzhak Shamir, was sent a notice that he might be harmed if the commission determined that, after he heard from Minister Zippori on 17.9.82 of the report regarding the Phalangists' actions in the refugee camps, he did not take the appropriate steps to clarify whether this information was based on fact and did not bring the information to the knowledge of the Prime Minister or the Minister of Defense.

In the Memorandum that the Foreign Minister submitted to us in response to the aforementioned notice, he explained that what he had heard from Minister Zippori about the 'unruliness' of the Phalangists did not lead him to understand that it was a matter of a massacre; he thought, rather, that it was a matter of fighting against terrorists.

It is not easy to decide between the conflicting versions of what Minister Zippori said to the Foreign Minister. We tend to the opinion that in the telephone conversation Minister Zippori spoke of a 'slaughter' being perpetrated by the Phalangists, and it is possible that he also spoke of 'unruliness'.

Nevertheless, we are unable to rule out the possibility that the Foreign Minister did not catch or did not properly understand the significance of what he heard from Minister Zippori. The Foreign Minister likewise did not conceal that in relating to what Minister Zippori had told him, he was influenced by his knowledge that Minister Zippori was opposed to the policy of the Minister of Defense and the Chief of Staff regarding the war in Lebanon, and particularly to cooperation with the Phalangists.

The phenomenon that came to light in this case – namely, that the statement of one minister to another did not receive the attention it deserved because of faulty relations between members of the cabinet – is regrettable and worrisome. The impression we got is that the Foreign Minister did not make any real attempt to check whether there was anything in what he had heard from Minister Zippori on the Phalangists' operations in the camps because he had an a priori skeptical attitude toward the statements of the minister who reported this information to him.

It is difficult to find a justification for information that came from a member of the Cabinet, especially under the circumstances in which the information was reported.

The Foreign Minister should at least have called the Defense Minister's attention to the information he had received and not contented himself with asking someone in his office whether any new information had come from Beirut and with the expectation that those people coming to his office would know what was going on and would tell him if anything out of the ordinary had happened.

In our view, the Foreign Minister erred in not taking any measures after the conversation with Minister Zippori in regard to what he had heard from Zippori about the Phalangist actions in the camps.[55]

It will be recalled that the cabinet had heard, on 16 September, their own Chief of Staff's statement that 'I see it in their eyes . . . what they are waiting for . . . Amin has already spoken of revenge and all of them are sharpening their blades.' Here, again, we see how the Commissioners drew the minimalist conclusions from the plain evidence before them. Zippori had been alerted by Ze'ev Schiff, the military analyst for *Ha aretz*, and it is reasonable to hypothesize that he either informed Shamir of his source, or the Foreign Minister asked him for his source. Additionally,

Shamir may have personally disliked Zippori for his hesitations regarding the Chief of Staff's policy, but Zippori was only confirming – the next day – the fears of that very Chief of Staff. Shamir disregarded, first, the Chief of Staff's remark, and then Zippori's accurate report, because, it seems – emotionally and consciously – he *wanted* a massacre. That is the only conclusion consonant with his entire career as one of Zionism's pre-eminent murderers and fanatics.

Shamir Comes to Power: the Silence is Deafening

Why was there no outcry from within the ranks of Zion at the accession to power of a man with a record like Shamir's? Only a few months before, in February, two journalists writing in *Ha aretz*, the country's leading daily, had discussed the Stern Gang's proposition to the Nazis, on the occasion of the then Foreign Minister's denunciation of left Zionist Uri Avneri for interviewing Arafat. But beyond a call by M. K. Virshuvski of the tiny *Shinui* Party for an investigation, no one paid much attention to the exposé.

When Shamir was nominated to succeed Begin, the Israeli Association of Anti-Fascist Fighters and Victims of Nazism sent telegrams to President Herzog and the cabinet, pleading with them not to allow Shamir to take office, basing their appeal on the recent evidence that Shamir was 'one who made efforts to reach an alliance with the official representatives of Nazi Germany.'[56] And Professor Yesheyahu Leibowitz, one of Israel's most distinguished scholars and social critics, duly wrote a letter to *Ha aretz*, demanding to know why there was indeed no such outcry at the fact that the country now had a would-be collaborator for its Prime Minister. The official opposition, the Alignment, was, however, silent.

Their silence was based on two considerations. Immediately, they had no real desire to take power in the wake of the collapse of the Israeli stock exchange, but there were also profound historical reasons for their lassitude. The Labour Zionists had been fully aware of the Stern Gang's politics when they had allowed them into the Tnuat HaMeri, in 1945, and the Labour government knew Shamir's personal history when they recruited him into their Mossad. They were familiar with Herut's Fascist past when they took Begin into their cabinet in 1967. How could they, in 1983, suddenly pretend to be shocked by Shamir's past? Additionally, they had linked themselves to so many criminals since the Holocaust – Nixon and Vorster immediately come to mind – that they had lost all interest in complaining about a mere would-be collaborator with Adolf Hitler.

The Economic Crisis

On 10 October 1983 Shamir was voted in, 60–53, but not before the customary concessions to the Aguda, so characteristic of the Likud. They were duly promised their pound of flesh: a bill curtailing the marketing of pork products (present law only bans the raising of pigs in non-Christian areas). And the government agreed to pressure the Mayor of Jerusalem into abandoning the planned building of a mixed (ie, male and female) swimming pool in a neighbourhood near a projected Orthodox quarter.[57] But he was immediately confronted with a problem far more crucial than any number of pigs or scantily-clad bathers: the collapse of the *boursa*, the Tel Aviv stock exchange. For this he had the standard answer of reactionaries the world over: budget cuts. 'The standard of living and consumption will be reduced, excepting those of the lower income groups.'[58]

Even before the crisis, the statistics clearly foretold that the economy was heading for disaster. While unemployment was only 5% nationally, it was averaging 23% for 18–24-year-olds in the development towns. Unemployment among youth in the urban Jewish slums was estimated to be nearly as high.[59] At the same time, August exports were down 15% from the previous August. 'Security exports' were sharply off.[60] Israel's agriculture was losing its markets as other states closed the scientific gap. The Moshav system, the private farms loosely connected via marketing co-ops, were in dire danger of going under as they had failed to follow the example of the kibbutzim, which had previously diversified into industry. On the other hand, imports were soaring as the trade deficit ran to $5 billion for 1982.

The annual inflation rate of 132% virtually compelled the broad public to look for ways to reduce their bills, and Yoram Aridor, Begin's Finance Minister, had coolly calculated that the government would be in a better position if the people invested in stocks rather than in consumer goods. New issues were allowed on condition that some of the money taken in was then loaned to the state.[61] The market took off and the Index of Shares leaped 70% net of inflation. News that Israel had no capital gains tax brought in foreign speculators. Eventually the boom was followed by a bust, and the banks had to get massive loans from the government in their efforts to hold up the market and then, finally, shares in their own banks, as, by early October, the public began to sell these in their frantic rush to convert their fast devaluating shekels into dollars. The collapse of the local currency drove the people into the supermarkets with the certainty that prices were sure to rise. The stock exchange was forced to close down, and the 12 October *Post* ran three pictures: a happy Shamir, smiling as he sat down in the Prime Minister's chair, a gloomy Finance Minister, and a line of shoppers lined up in a supermarket. By 17 October Aridor was out and Yigal Cohen-Orgad took his place. Only three months before, he had tried to speak at the Herut centre, and had gone

only so far as to say that Aridor's policies had failed, when pandemonium broke loose, and the meeting had to be adjourned for fear of his safety.[62]

The new minister could offer the public only a wave of cuts in their standard of living. An immediate 50% rise in the price of subsidized foods, fuels and other items, and a 23% rise in the cost of imported goods, were followed by a rise in interest rates and the doubling of the foreign travel tax. Taxes were put on child allowances and pensions. Fees were charged for children attending school. The proposal was made for compelling the unemployed to accept any job offered them within a 60 kilometer radius of their homes, or lose their benefits.[63] The declared goal is to lower the general public's standard of living by 10% to 12%, and that of workers in the governmental sector by 15%.[64] It was assumed that unemployment would rise but Cohen-Orgad insisted that no more than 18,000 Jews would be unemployed as the first to go would be many of the 80,000 Arab workers from the occupied territories.[65]

The Histadrut bureaucrats, as usual, reacted in the most minimalist manner, with a two-hour strike on 16 October, despite the demands from local councils and works committees for a full-day walkout.[66] On 12 December 1983, even the editorialists at the *Post* complained that:

> . . . the erosion of real wages between October and January may amount to 40–50 per cent. The great mystery in all this is what Yeroham Meshel, the Secretary-General of the Histadrut, is doing about it. Is he waiting for spontaneous strikes so as to be carried along on the crest of the waves of discontent? Or has he quietly accepted the argument that the only alternative for the present cut in real wages is mass unemployment, which he fears even more.[67]

If it is realized that Israeli industrial workers earned only an average $4.67 an hour in 1982, compared to Spain's average industrial wage of $4.99, it is amply clear that their situation will become critical.[68] If either the Alignment or the PLO had the slightest strategic capacity, Shamir – and the Likud – would fall like a shot. As it is, he will almost certainly lose office in the not too far future, as broad discontent mounts, even if he is to be replaced only by another Likud figure or the do-nothings of the Alignment. Given the nationalist stagnation of the PLO, and its present internecine strife, the drift of the Oriental workers away from the Likud, a slow but sure certainty now, will not immediately develop in the direction of anti-Zionism. We are, however, witnessing the initial stages of the terminal illness of Zionism.

It is impossible for any conceivable Zionist regime to solve its economic problems without paying a staggering political price. As Jabotinsky correctly pointed out, Zionism is a colonizing venture, fundamentally at odds with the national aspirations of the Palestinians, and the pan-Arab masses. It is Zionism's successful domination of Palestine, and now south Lebanon, that guarantees that it will remain isolated from the broader Arab market. Not even the opening of Egypt under the Camp David

accord has altered this, as the Egyptian people refuse to buy Israeli commodities, especially after Lebanon. Additionally, Israeli products can find no open market in any Muslim country except Turkey, or any Communist state except Romania, and much of Africa and Asia is likewise barred to Israeli exports.

Zionism most definitely has made the desert bloom, its agriculture is its adornment. Nevertheless, agricultural exports now constitute only 10% of its exports and in 1983 it was estimated that 150,000 tons of citrus had to be destroyed as excessive costs of both water and land, and increasingly scientific competition from Morocco, Algeria, Spain and Greece, have eaten into Israel's European markets.[69] The thrust of Israel's economic evolution has been necessarily away from agriculture and toward high-tech industrial exports, notably arms, based on the skills of its educated stratum. Its recent metamorphosis into a classic colonial exploiter of native cheap labour has, however, created an unsolvable problem regarding its unemployed and under-educated youth in the Jewish slums and the development towns, who have no place in the new scientific order, and who can no longer reconcile themselves to poorly paid manual labour, which they now see as fit only for Arabs.

The military has served to sop up the unemployment problem by withdrawing the youth from the job market for 28 months, and then demanding one month per year from virtually all Jewish males under the age of 45. It provides a career outlet for the surplus kibbutz population, who, even under a Likud regime they profess to despise, provide a disproportionate percentage of the air force and other specialist cadres. Additionally, contact with advanced military equipment has served to develop the entire workforce's technical abilities. Nevertheless, Zionism's hypermilitarism is a crushing economic burden. In 1982, debt repayment, largely for imported weaponry, constituted 35% of the GNP for 1982.[71]

America Comes to the Rescue

In its attempt to resolve the economic crisis, the Shamir regime has moved in two directions. Cohen-Orgad is recommending a partial freeze on further West Bank colonization. Thirty-one new settlements were proposed, but the Finance Minister wants to withhold funding from most of them.[72] The Settlers' Organization, quite rightly, proclaimed his policy to be 'ideological suicide' as any retreat, no matter how small, raises the spectre of the ultimate demise of the entire Zionist endeavour.

On 29 October 1983, the Reagan administration issued National Security Directive III, opting for an expanded Israeli role in Lebanon, and on Shamir's 28 November–2 December visit to Washington he agreed to co-operate strategically with America. A committee will plan joint military exercises, arrange the American use of Haifa port and the warehousing of US supplies in Israel. At present, the US arms package to

Israel is $1.7 billion, half of it a grant. In fiscal 1985 America will give Israel only $1.4 billion in weaponry, but all of it will be a grant. Fifteen per cent of the money is to be spent domestically by the Israelis on the development of the Lavie fighter, instead of on purchases of American planes, an unprecedented arrangement in the history of US military assistance to its clients. The Pentagon will be allowed to buy more Israeli goods and services. Negotiations will begin on a free-trade pact, which only Canada now enjoys.[73]

Under the Alignment, Israeli policy was to avoid unduly antagonizing the Soviets but the Likud now sells itself to American public opinion as a militant bastion of the 'Free World' in the global struggle, and not merely in the Middle Eastern context.[74] Therefore the linkage with the virulently anti-Soviet Reagan naturally arouses broad concern within Israeli public opinion. Shamir is a plodding speaker, and no one believed his 5 December 1983 Knesset speech denying that he had made any secret military commitments. *Ha'aretz* bluntly stated that it was difficult to believe that the Americans and Israelis did not co-ordinate their air strikes against the Syrian and Lebanese national forces.[75]

The Future

Israeli opinion became increasingly polarized by the continued occupation of Lebanon, and the defeat of Gemayel's forces in West Beirut and the subsequent withdrawal of the US marines has only exacerbated the internal tension. When Shamir visited South Lebanon in early November 1983, a reservist told him that it seemed to him as if he was in a film about the German conquest of Europe, and a huge minority of Israelis already agree with him.[76] In early February, even before the Phalangist defeat, *Ha aretz* reported that 39.5% of Israelis favoured an unconditional withdrawal.[77] The Gemayel debacle and the Reagan retreat meant that the Likud had failed in its effort to impose a government in Beirut that would join it in policing the southern part of the country, and Shamir was left with two choices: withdrawal, which will be interpreted as a political, if not military, defeat, or permanent occupation of Southern Lebanon, with the certainty of more Israeli deaths, without bringing a political solution of the Palestinian problem any closer into sight. Further: in either case, Israel will never regain its popular support in the US. Reagan's miscalculation was that he thought the 'post-Vietnam syndrome' to finally have become a thing of the past. Instead he ultimately had to face the fact that the American people are not prepared to see their youth die in defence of the capitalist system. The anti-Zionist element in the US will know how to take advantage of the new 'post-Lebanon syndrome' to mobilize against any attempts by the politicians to utilize an increasingly unwilling Israeli soldiery to do Wall Street's dirty work.

In both societies the growing anti-war mood is stultified by the profound

ideological backwardness of the broad masses, though for vastly different reasons. In rich America, reformism, based on that wealth, is endemically strong, and the matter is made worse in the case of Palestine owing to the financial dependence of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party – which, in all other cases, electorally expresses the anti-war sentiments of broad layers of the public, even if timidly – on the same rich Jewish donors who contribute to the Zionist coffers.[78] Professor Israel Shahak, the distinguished Israeli anti-Zionist, is absolutely correct when he writes that

> We see . . . how much the mainstream of American so-called human rights activism has been corrupted when the question is one of Jewish racism . . . To this day (1983), you will not find very many organizations in the US that will utter a word of protest against this atrocity (destruction of homes which harbour alleged terrorists), and I mean not even those organizations which from time to time say a word or two about 'solving the Palestinian problem'.[79]

In Palestine, the masses, both Arab and Jewish, are still dominated by nationalist ideology. The leaders of the *Peace Now* movement, by far the largest element within the broad Jewish peace camp, are incurable racists. Their commitment to Zionism is so deep that they do not seek to recruit members among the 17% Arab minority within the Israeli citizenry.[80] It is well understood that any 'peace movement' that categorically refuses to recruit 17% of its country's population automatically dooms itself to impotence. *Peace Now* relies on the Alignment inevitably replacing the increasingly unpopular Likud. To be sure, the Likud will inexorably fall, but to think that the colonialists and racists of the Alignment can solve the crisis of a colonial and racist society is to demonstrate extreme naivety.

For the Palestinian cause to go forward, it must overcome its nationalism, reformism and terrorism. The PLO is now deeply divided by its recent fratricidal civil war in Lebanon, and the subsequent visit of Arafat to Mubarak of Egypt. It is too early to tell whether it will continue as one entity, or even if any of its contending factions wil continue in their present form. One thing is, however, absolutely certain: the struggle against Zionism will go on, and inevitably it will succeed.

Jabotinsky was quite correct in defining Zionism as a colonial and racist enterprise. He envisioned a triumphant Zionist state amidst a Middle East and a world dominated by imperialism, with the Palestinian population accepting their lot, as so many native peoples had been forced to do before them. He did not foresee our world, a world where most of the then colonial peoples have won their independence. He could never have anticipated a situation in which the Palestinians are the most educated element in the Arab world, and, inexorably, that will be the downfall of Zionist-Revisionism and its doctrine of the iron wall. For it is not in the nature of the modern educated mind to accept even the slightest inequality between nations. The Palestinians have endured many terrible ordeals, and further trials will be their fate, but they have the capacity for

ideological growth, as do all oppressed forces, and they will, inevitably, develop the correct strategy for victory.

The antidote to the policy of the iron wall is a democratic secular movement for a democratic secular Palestine, an organizition uniting the Palestinian people with the progressive minority of Jews, a minority sure to grow as a result of the unending wars imposed on the Jewish population by the very nature of Zionism, and the economic crisis created by those same wars. To think otherwise, to believe in the permanency of the iron wall, is to hold that there will be an eternal exception to the drive toward a democratic secular world.

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Index

Abdul Hamid II 17, 38-9
Abdullah, King of Jordan 140, 149
Abdul-Majid Buchari 94-6
Abu Nidal 177
Abuhatzeira, Aharon 168, 173
Achimeir, Abba 77, 90-2, 94, 96, 146
Adenauer, Konrad 150-1
Agudat Yisrael 159, 166, 173, 207
Ajweh, Ismail 175
Allenby, Edmund 50, 54, 61
Alter, Viktor 121
Anders, Wladyslaw 126-7
Ankori, Zvi 142
Arab League 140
Arafat, Yasser 178-9
Arazi-Tennenbaum, Yehuda 95, 102
Archer-Cust (Col.) 138
Arendt, Hannah 146
Arens, Moshe 163, 183
Argov, Shlomo 177
Aridor, Yoram 207-8
Arlosoroff, Chaim 91-5, 114, 116-17, 145
Arlosoroff, Mrs Sima 92, 94-6, 115
Arnold, Aliza, *see* Begin, Aliza
Ashbel, Michael 156
Attlee, Clement 134
Avneri, Uri 206

Baal Shem Tov 11
Balfour, Arthur 55, 63
Balfour Declaration 49, 57-8
Bar Kochba, Shimon 113
Barak, Aharon 182, 184, 188
Barazani, Moshe 156
Bauer, Yehuda 131, 136-7
Beck, Jozef 102
Begin, Aliza (Arnold) 117, 120, 192
Begin, Hasia (Korsovsky) 111-12
Begin, Herzl 111-12
Begin, Menachem: and Altalena 144-6; and Betar 114-17; and Biryonim 119; and Camp David 161, 163, 204; and Dir Yassin 141-3; and elections 149, 152-4, 157-9, 172-3; and economy 161, 163, 207; and Herut 146-7, 149-55, 192, 206; and Irgun 129-32, 134, 137-46, 200-1; and Jabotinsky 79, 104, 109, 113-18; and Jordan 127, 144, 146, 155, 157; and Likud 156-7, 159; and Lithuania 120-3; and massacre 161, 176, 182-9; and NKVD 121-6; and Orientals 159, 165; and Po'ale Zion 96; and army-in-exile 126-7, 129-30; and racism 174-5; and religion 130, 152-3, 166-9; and reparations 150-2; and resignation 192-3; and S. Africa 152, 156, 169-70; and US 170-1, 179-81; youth 111-12
Begin, Rachel 111-12
Begin, Wolf Dov 111-14
Beilis, Mendel 33
Benari, Yehuda 117
Ben-Eliazer, Arye 130
Ben-Gurion, David 41, 43, 91, 96, 108, 131, 134-6, 145, 149-52, 168, 199, 202-3
Benkendorf, Count 46
Benvinisti, Meron 174
Ben-Yair, Eleazer 194
Ben-Yosef, Shlomo 156
Ben-Zvi, Itzhak 41
Bernadotte, Folke 146, 149, 202-3

Betar 78-9, 87, 97, 104, 114-17, 121, 157
Bethell, Nicholas 197-8
Bet Zouri, Eliyahu 193, 200-1
Bevin, Ernest 134, 139
Bialik, Chaim Nachman 17
Black Pantherism 159, 166
Blackshirts 97
Bols, Louis 59
Bolsheviks 19, 26
Botha, Reolof 169
Brandeis, Louis 58
Brezhnev, Leonid 155
Briscoe, Robert 103
Brit HaBiryonim 90-2, 96, 119
Brit HaChayal 79, 126
British Labour Party 134
Brunetti, Angelo (Ciceruacchio) 5
Buber, Martin 31
Buchari, Abdul-Majid, *see* Abdul-Majid
Bund 18-22, 26, 126-7
Byrd, F.W. 95

Cadets 23-4
Carter, Jimmy 162, 170, 172, 204
Castro, Fidel 156
Chamoun, Dany 185
Chazit Ha'am 90-2
Chicherin, Georgi 48
Churchill, Winston 55, 63, 131, 139
CIA 158
Civitavecchia 97, 103
Clausewitz, Karl von 82, 176
Cohen, Yehoshua 203
Cohen-Orgad, Yigal 207-9
Commission of Inquiry 181-9, 204-6
Committee Against the War 180
Conservative Judaism 167
Corday, Charlotte 8
Cyrus the Great 77

d'Annunzio, Gabriele 79
Dante Alighieri 4, 61, 79
Dashewski, Pincus 13
Dayan, Moshe 157, 159, 172, 204
de Haas, Jacob 98
Democratic Faction 13
Democratic Movement for Change 159, 173
Democratic Party 138-40, 171, 211
De Mille, Cecil Blount 79
de Reynier, Jacques 142
Dollfuss, Engelbert 96
Doyle, Arthur Conan 61
Draper, Morris 187
Drori, Amir 183
Duma 22-5

Eckman, Lester 151n
Efrat, Yohah 182, 187
Ehrlich, Simcha 169
Einstein, Albert 146
Eisenhower, Dwight 136
Eisenstein, Sergei 18
(Eldad), *see* Scheib, Israel
Eshkol, Levi 153-4
Eytan, Rafael 183, 187-8, 205-6

Faisal I, King of Iraq 50, 54, 56, 59, 65
Falwell, Jerry 169
Fatah 178-9
Fianna Fáil 103
Fidel, *see* Castro
Fitzgerald, Edward 79
Franco, Francisco 185
Franjieh, Suleiman 185
Franjieh, Tony 185
Frank, Gerold 197
Freud, Sigmund 11
Friedman, Milton 161
Friedman, Robert 176

Gahal 153
Galadyk, Jan 126
Gaon, Nessim 168
Gapon, Georgi 21
Garibaldi, Giuseppe 5
Gazit, Mordechai 175
Gelpern, Anna Markova, *see* Jabotinsky, A.
Gemayel, Amin 186-7, 205, 210
Gemayel, Bashir 177, 181, 184-6, 189
Gemayel, Pierre 185
General Zionists 149, 153
George V, King of England 70
Gervasi, Frank 151n
Gessner, Robert 70
Guevara, Che 156
Giladi, Eliyahu 199

Gilner, Elias 18
Gladstone, William 184
Glazman, Josef 121
Goldberg, Joseph 21
Goldmann, Nahum 32, 34, 57, 150
Goldstein, Bernard 121
Golomb, Eliyahu 201
Gorky, Maxim 8
Grabski, Wladislaw 84
Greenberg, Uri Zvi 90, 116, 146
Gromyko, Andre 139
Gruner, Dov 156
Gush, Emunim 159

Ha avara 93
Haber, Eitan 151n
Haganah 59-63, 99-100, 102, 131-2, 134-5
Haig, Alexander 180
Hakim, Eliyahu 156, 200
Halperin, Samuel 136
Haman (or Persia) 198
Harel, Isser 203
Hashomer 43
Hashomer Hatzair 113
Henderson, Loy 139
Henshags 39
Hentig, Werner Otto von 194
Hermoni, Aaron 25
Herut 146-7, 149-55, 192, 206
Herzl, Theodor 9, 12-17, 22, 24, 33, 38-40, 124
Herzog, Chaim 206
Herzog, Isaac Halevi 142
Hirschler, Gertrude 151
Histadrut 90-1, 96, 150, 154, 158, 161, 164, 171
Hitler, Adolf 91-3, 96, 101, 122, 194, 196, 198
Ho Chi Minh 156
Hook, Sidney 146
Hovevi Zion 12
al-Husayni, al-Hajj Amin 60, 85, 99, 140
al-Husayni, Musa Kazim 59
Hussein, King of Jordan 155, 172, 181
Hussein, Saddam 178

Ilan, Amitsur 203
Irgun 99-100, 104-6, 129-32, 134-5, 137-9, 193-4, 196, 200-1; and Altalena 144-6; and Dir Yassin 141-3
Iron Wall 73-5, 82, 211-12
Isaac, Erich 155
Isaac, Rael Jean 155
Israel-South Africa Friendship League 156
Israeli Association of anti-Fascist Fighters 206
Izwolsky, Alexandr 24

Jabotinsky, Anna Markova (Gelperin) 32-3, 37
Jabotinsky, Eri 32-3
Jabotinsky, Khava 2-3, 5-6
Jabotinsky, Mitia 6
Jabotinsky, Tamar 3, 6
Jabotinsky, Vladimir and anti-Nazi boycott 92-3; and Arlosoroff murder 91, 94-6; and Begin 104, 113-8, 123, 132, 155, 159-60; and burial 108, 153; evaluation 108-9; and Haganah 54, 56, 58-62; and Hebrew language 32-5; and iron wall 73-5, 171, 208, 211; and Irgun 99-100, 105, 193-4, 196; and Jewish Legion 44-8, 50-2; and Mussolini 5, 87, 97-8; and Petliura 64, 66-71; and Poland 102-3; and racism 29-32, 61, 64, 79-81, 106-7; and religion 6, 11, 101-2, 167-8; and Revisionism 72-82, 86-7, 89-101; and Russian Jewry 11, 23; and Russian Zionism 9, 16-18, 24-8, 34-5; and Turkey 37-8, 40-3, 46; and World War II 105-7; youth 2-8; and Zionist Executive 62-4
Jabotinsky, Yona 2, 6
Jamal Pasha 43
Jewish Colonial Trust Bank 24
Jewish Defense League 156
Jewish Independent Workers' Party 21
Jewish Legion 43-52
Judah Maccabee 76

Kahan, Mark 126-7
Kahan, Yitzhak 182, 184, 186-7
Kahana, Meir 156
Kaiser Wilhelm I Hohenzollern 2
Kaiser Wilhelm II Hohenzollern 14, 45
Kamenev, Lev 28

Kann, Jacobus 40-1
Kanter, Phepard 192
Katz, Mordechai 87
Katz, Shmuel 146
Kerensky, Alexandr 49
Khalid, King of Saudi Arabia 179
Khomeini, Ruhullah 178
Kitchener, Lord Horatio 44
el-Kilani, Rachid Ali 129
Kimche, Jon 143
Korsovsky, Hasia, *see* Begin, Hasia
Krushevan, Pavoliki 9-10, 13
Kutcher, Arthur 175

Labriola, Antonio 4
Labour Alignment 157, 159, 165-7, 169, 172-3, 182, 193, 210-1; *see also* Labour Zionism; Mapai; Po'ale Zionism
Labour Zionism 21, 41, 96, 157, 159, 206; *see also* Labour Alignment, Mapai, Po'ale Zionism
Lamarr, Hedy 79
Landau, David 184
Laval, Pierre 134
Lawrence, Thomas Edward 50
Lazar-Litai, Chaim 121
League of Zionist-Revisionists 72
Lebanese National Movement 179
Leibowitz, Yesheyahu 206
Lenin, Vladimir 19-20, 27-8
Lermontov, Mikhail 3
Lev, Hagai 176
Levy, David 182, 187-9, 192
Liberalism 153-4, 157, 173; *see also* General Zionists; Likud
Likud 157-9, 166-7, 210-1; *see also* Begin; Herut; Liberalism; Shamir
Lloyd George, David 49, 51, 63
Lord Moyne (Walter Guiness) 95, 131, 197, 200-1
Louis XVI Bourbon 34
Lubinczik, Naphtali 194, 197
Luzzati, Luigi 5

Malan, Daniel 152
Mapai 149, 153, 157-8; *see also* Labour Alignment; Labour Zionism; Po'ale Zionism
Mapam 113, 149, 151; *see also* Hashomer Hatzair
Marat, Jean Paul 8
Martov, Julius 19
Marx, Karl 10-11
Mature, Victor 79
Mazzini, Giuseppe 17
Medem, Vladimir 22, 25
Meir, Golda 154, 157
Melman, Seymour 146
Mendele Mocher Sforim 23
Mensheviks 19-20, 24, 26
Meridor, Yaakov 130, 169
Merlin, Shmuel 104, 114, 146
Meshel, Yeroham 208
Mickiewicz, Adam 3
Mildenstein, Leopold von 93
Mizrachi 12-13, 88, 158, 166, 168, 172-3
Morris, Benny 203
Mubarak, Hosni 178-80
Muhammed V (of Turkey) 43
Mussolini, Benito 5, 91, 93, 97-8, 103, 153, 185, 194, 198

Nasser, Gamal 152, 154
Nabokov, Constantine 46
Navon, Yitzhak 193
Nazarbekian, Avetis 39
Nedava, Joseph 29
Nedem Pasha, Mahmud 39
New Zionist Organization 98, 101, 103
Newlinski, Philip 39
Nicholas II Romanov 17, 22-4
Nixon, Richard 159, 176

O'Dwyer, William 146
Ofer, Avraham 158
Okhrana 9, 19, 21-2
Olmert, Ehud 193
Omar Khayyam 61
Orientals 158-9, 164-6, 173, 192-3, 208

Pa'el, Meir 142
Palestine Liberation Organization, *see* PLO
Patterson, Henry 56, 76
Peace Now 165, 180, 182, 211
Peres, Shimon 165, 185
Peron, Juan 150
Petliura, Simon 64, 66-70

Phalangist Party 181-9, 205, 210
Pilsudski, Jozef 67, 101, 103
Plekhanov, Georgi 19-20
Plevhe, Vyacheslav von 9, 13-16, 22, 124
PLO 166, 177-8, 181, 211
Po'ale Zionism 20, 22, 69
Poe, Edgar Allan 3, 79
Poland 101-3
Porat, Uri 193
Prato, David 98
Progressive Socialist Party 179
Purishkevich, V.M. 20
Puskin, Alexandr 3

Qadaffi, Muamar 178
Quisling, Vidkun 134
al-Qassam, Izz al-Din 98

Rabin, Leah 158
Rabin, Yitzhak 158-60, 164
Rabinowicz, Oscar 29
racism 29-32, 61, 64, 79-81, 106-7, 152, 156, 158-9, 164-6, 169-70, 174-5
Rada 66-8
Rafi Party 172
Rakah 159, 166
Raziel, David 105-6, 129, 193-4
Reagan, Ronald 170-1, 179-81, 209-10
Reform Judaism 167
Revisionism, *see* Begin; Betar; Brit Ha Biryonim; Herut; Iron Wall; Irgun; Jabotinsky; Likud; Stern Gang; Shamir
Revisionist Party 131, 149
Rhodes, Cecil 11-12
Rogers, William 154
Rosenbaum, Shimson 23
Rosenblatt, Zvi 92, 94, 114
Roser, Alfred 194
Rostand, Edmond 79
Rothschild, Nathaniel 14
Rothschild, Edmond de 88
Rozen-Szeczakacz, Leon 126
Runge, Captain 117
Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party 18, 20
Rutenberg, Pinhas 96

el-Sadat, Anwar 161-3, 204
Saguy, Yehoshua 183
Samson 79-82
Samuel, Herbert 61, 85
Schechtman, Joseph 6, 25, 27, 29, 63-4, 69
Scheib (Eldad), Israel 115-16, 123, 129, 198, 200
Schiff, Ze'ev 205
Schumann, Robert 202
Schwartzbard, Shalom 70
Shahak, Israel 211
Shamir, Yitzhak 129, 183, 192-3, 195, 197-210 *passim*
Shapira-Libal, Nitza 175
Sharett, Moshe (Shertok) 41, 135
Sharon, Ariel 156-7, 159, 169-70, 177; and massacre 182-9
Shayevich, Heinrich 21-2
Shertok, *see* Sharett
Sheskin, Miron 126-7
Shipler, David 177, 184-5, 188, 192
Shlomzion Party 159; *see also* Sharon
Shmulewitz, Matityahu 203
Shochat, Israel 41, 43
Shultz, George 180
Slavinsky, Maxim 66-7
Slawoy-Skladkowski, Felicjan 102
Smygly-Rydz, Edward 102
Sneh, Moshe 121, 135
Social Revolutionaries 8, 15
Society for Support of Jewish Agriculturalists 4
Sokolow, Florian 24
Sokolow, Nahum 24, 45
South Africa 152, 156, 169-70
Stalin, Josef 27-9, 91, 127, 139-40
Stavsky, Avraham 92, 94, 114, 145
Steed, Wickham 58
Stern, Avraham 103, 106, 116-7, 129, 193-4, 197-201
Stern Gang 106, 129, 131, 134-5, 141, 146, 149, 193-4, 222-3; and Nazis 194-9, 206
Stolypin, Pyotr 24
Storrs, Ronald 55, 59-61, 99
St. Petersburg Workmens' Association 21
Syrkin, Nachman 3

Tami 166, 168, 173
Tehomi, Avraham 99
Thatcher, Margaret 177
Tiglath Pileser III (of Assyria) 22
Tito, Josip 140
Tnuat HaMeri 134-5, 137-8
Trotsky, Lev Davidovich 19, 55, 108, 112, 268
Truman, Harry 138, 140
Trumpeldor, Yosef 49
Tshuma, General 120

Unity and Progress Party 41
Uriel, R.Z. 142

Victor Emmanuel III (of Italy) 39-40
Virgil, Publius 113
Virshuvski (Member Knesset) 206
Vilner, Meir 202
Vorster, Johannes 156, 160, 206

Wagner, Cosima 55
Wallace, Henry 139
Warhaftig, Zerah 121
Wedgwood, Josiah 76
Weisl, Wolfgang von 90, 98, 146
Weizman, Ezer 170, 172
Weizmann, Chaim 10, 12-3, 16, 45, 54, 56, 58-9, 61, 63, 65, 69-70, 88, 93, 102, 135, 149
Witte, Sergei 24
Wilbushevich, Manya 21-2, 41, 43
Wolffsohn, David 24, 40-1
World Sephardic Federation 168

Yadin, Yigal 143, 159
Yadlin, Asher 158
Yalin-Mor, Nathan 117, 120-1, 129, 149, 194, 197-8, 200-3
Yaron, Amos 183
Young Turks 37, 40
Yzernitsky, Yitzhak 193, 198-200; *see also* Shamir

Zhitlovsky, Chaim 15, 22
Zinoviev, Grigori 28
Zion Mule Corp 44-6, 48-9
Zippori, Mordechai 204-5
Zubatov, Sergei 21-2

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Middle East · Contemporary History

THE IRON WALL
ZIONIST REVISIONISM FROM JABOTINSKY TO SHAMIR

LENNI BRENNER

The Iron Wall is a comprehensive and documented history of Revisionism which is now the dominant ideological tendency in present-day Zionism. Starting with the pre-Revisionist period of Vladimir Jabotinsky's life, this book traces the origins and course of what used to be regarded as the lunatic fringe of Zionism, but which has, since 1977, dominated the Likud Administrations of Menachem Begin, and now Yitzhak Shamir. Lenni Brenner gives his readers an account of Revisionism that is indispensable to any understanding of the Israeli Government's policies on the West Bank and in the Middle East as a whole.

Jabotinsky, the movement's founder, laid down ideological guidelines not merely for his own tendency within Zionism, but, indeed, increasingly for Zionism as a whole. He was explicit in his racism, his colonialism, and the pro-capitalist nature of his movement. Arguing that no compromise with the Palestinians was possible, his stance led the Revisionists into close connections with Mussolini as well as terrorism against the Arabs.

Begin saw himself explicitly as his mentor's successor, with results since 1977 that are there for all to see. And the subsequent Likud Prime Minister, Shamir, was himself the last of the Revisionist leaders. He created the Stern Gang that proposed a war-time alliance with Adolf Hitler and the establishment of a totalitarian Jewish state. As Lenni Brenner shows in this deeply disturbing book, Shamir's Revisionist legacy makes it likely that he will further curtail the rights of Israel's Jews as well as subject the Palestinians to yet more repression and militarist aggression, as Zionism spirals ever further to the Right.

Lenni Brenner is a Jewish American historian and journalist, who has been deeply distressed by the direction that Israeli society has taken since 1948, and the consequences for both Jews and Arabs in the world today. His previous book, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators,* has been described as 'a well documented and relentless condemnation of Zionism's failure (in pre-War Europe) to defend the Jews and its exploitation of Jewish suffering.' (*The Middle East*) Brenner has written for the *Jewish Guardian, Middle East International, International Socialist Review,* and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution.*

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